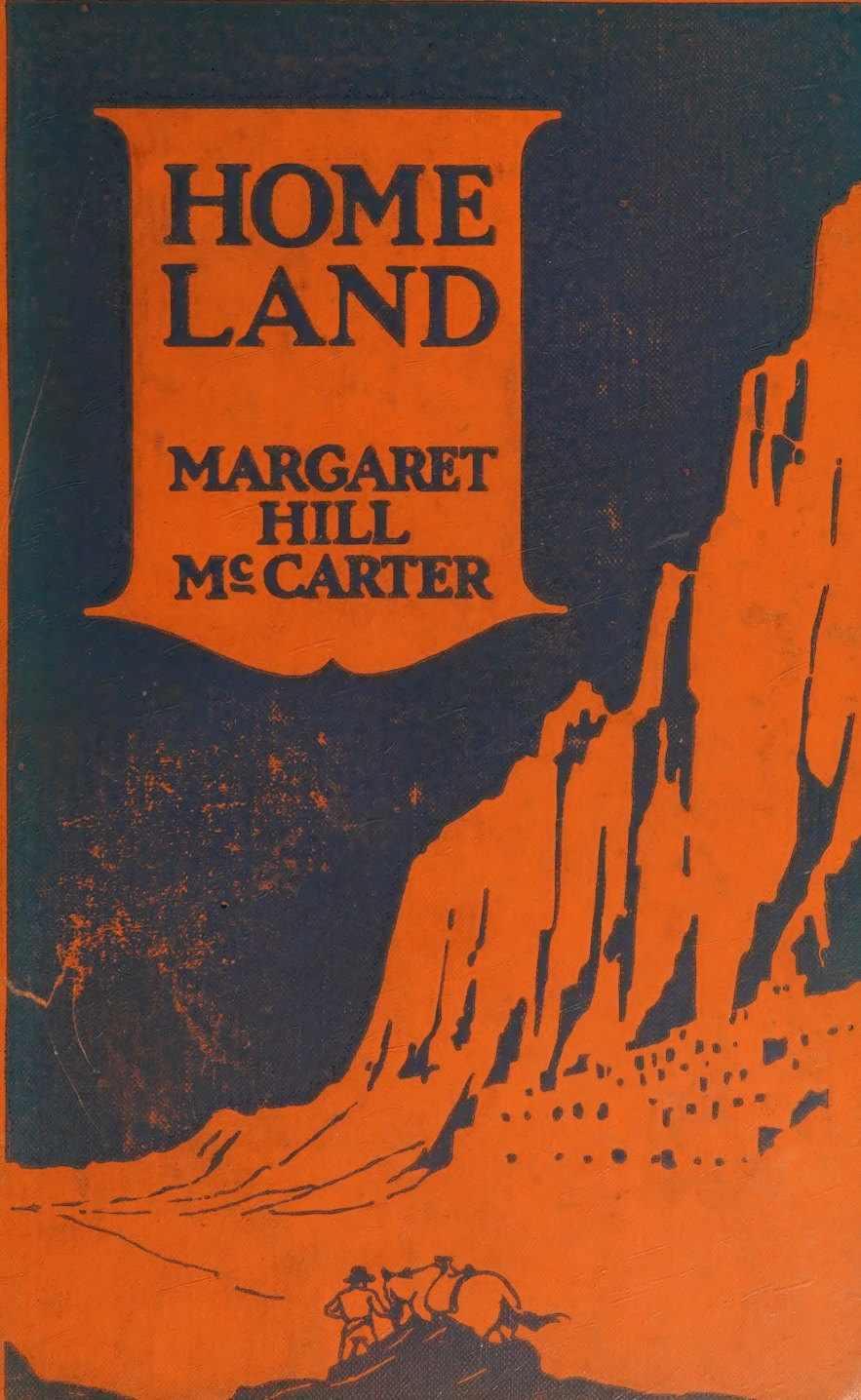
HOME LAND

MARGARET HILL McCARTER



HOMELAND

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MARGARET HILL McCARTER

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HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK
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HOMELAND

A Present-Day Love Story

By

MARGARET HILL McCARTER

Author of "VANGUARDS OF THE PLAINS",
"THE RECLAIMERS" ETC.

HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
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HOMELAND

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FOREWORD

It is very big, this Homeland of a hundred million people—abiding place of men, women, and children, native born and English tongued, with men, women, and children of almost every other tribe and tongue. . . . Inside its far-flung boundary lines are diverse natural features; mountains and valleys, prairies and deserts, forests, lakes, and cañons; craters of old volcanoes and marshes newly drained. . . . Widely differing, too, are the problems of these many millions in these many and diverse places, the solution of each a call for able statesmanship. . . . But all this vast and varied Homeland, with its multitudes of people of vast and varied interests, is gripped and held at one central point, the American hearthstone. One symbol hangs over all—the Stars and Stripes.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
	Foreword	v
	Portrait of a Lady	ix
I.	On Lonely Trails	1
II.	When Friend Meets Friend	20
III.	Misreading the Signs	42
IV.	The Woman Before the Grate	85
V.	"A Scrap of Paper"	102
VI.	The Portrait on the Mantel	129
VII.	Meeting America's Best	151
VIII.	A Daughter of Judas	174
IX.	A Verdict Rendered	201
X.	"Fur Together"	222
XI.	Burning the Bridges, but Leaving the Bridge Sites	243
XII.	When Greek Meets Turk	262
XIII.	Expert Findings	274
XIV.	Helping the Helpful	301
XV.	The Winning Hand	319
XVI.	A Forgotten Homeland	332
XVII.	Helping the Helpless	362
XVIII.	Portrait of a Lady	384
XIX.	The Courage of Peace	401
XX.	A Home in the Homeland	423

A PRESENT-DAY LOVE STORY
PORTRAIT OF A LADY

Cid Jannison, christened Cinderella, was never a heroine in any story. She was just a near-heroine. Her cousin Leslie, on her father's side of the house, was the real heroine in her life; and her cousin Jack Lorton, on her mother's side, was her hero. She played in between these two. Nobody knew exactly why she had not married, for her admirers among men were many and sincere. At thirty she was the last living member of her father's household, well-to-do, well educated, handsome, interested in present-day matters, industrious in social service, patriotic, hospitable, good natured, lovable. There are such women who make friends easily, and keep every friend they make. When Solomon gave his measure of womanliness—"Strength and honor are her clothing"—he might well have had Cid Jannison in mind. Down the centuries, from his day until now, there have always been Cid Jannisons who make the day's run bigger and better for all who know them. And always we accept these Cids—like most of our glorious blessings, light and air and eyesight—naturally, unthinkingly, instead of being unspeakably thankful for the riches vouchsafed to us.

HOMELAND

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I

ON LONELY TRAILS

IT was the time of early spring. The sun creeping up from the tropics was lengthening the daylight hours toward an equinoctial balance. In the far Southland the balmy breezes were wooing all the buds to blossoming. The California valleys, aglow with color and throbbing with life, were like the Garden of Eden. In the Middle West farmers were plowing for oats, or scattering fertilizing products on cornfields, or hauling the last bales of hay into town. But up in New England, though the first thaws were swelling the streamlets, the snow still covered the ground, and the icicles clung all day to the eaves of the roofs. While in the upper peninsula of Michigan every wheeled thing was still on its winter sled runners, and the path to the front door was still hard above the snow-buried paling fence. Little in common there could be in the daily lives of the people in so varied

a season, and faint and few the lines that might reach from corner to corner binding human interests and controlling human destinies. So detached and unimportant seem the doings of unrecorded days for detached and unimportant human beings.

In this springtime the skies of New Mexico, deeply blue and unscarred by a single cloud, curved wide above a silent colorful land; snow-hooded mountain heights, splotched with the black-green of piñon and cedar; red mesas in bald headlands; titantic masses of golden-brown rocks in endless confusion; purple-shadowed rifts; gray ridges of sage, sandy dry arroyo levels—all beaming under the surges of sunlight that wash over the great Southwest twelve months of every year. Sweeping down across the land, the "Grand River of the North," yellow and foam-slashed, wound its way between deep cañon walls, skirting the feet of tall mesa cliffs, cutting wide-wandering channels about the open plains, and sliding away at last toward the far Gulf-Nirvana, the end for which the mountain snows first fell and melted at its source.

Along the river for many miles a freight train pushed its way bumpingly indifferent, as if it were a homely, unimportant, sentient being voluntarily crawling down the Rio Grande Valley about its own business which was none of yours. There are no freight trains *de luxe*, and however useful they may be, they are colorless and uninspiring.

This train moving toward the south on this spring day was to the last degree a thing of its kind.

In the rear car were half a dozen men passengers, having no sort of fellowship one with another; a half-breed Indian back in the corner who evidently spoke no language; two Mexicans who sat far apart and exchanged words in their own tongue only briefly and at long intervals; a wanderer of the lost tribes of the Anglo-Saxon, born maybe in Pennsylvania, or Missouri, but on whose final resting place no man would venture a guess. Among these sat a big well-dressed Western man of the type that wears a Stetson hat with as becoming dignity as a king can wear a crown. There was nothing unfriendly in this man's bearing. He was evidently going about his own business which was absorbing his mind.

He had given a quick sweeping glance about the car when he entered it, and had taken his place without a word of greeting. Yet he had that peculiar personality that makes even a stranger unconsciously more comfortable because of his presence. He spent the time in reading the sheaf of daily papers, and a popular novel he had brought with him—giving the latter to the brakeman when he reached Santa Fe—and in staring abstractedly out of the window at scenery that was evidently not new to him.

The sixth passenger had entered the car just

in front of the big well-dressed man, and had not discovered the latter's presence until the train was in full jerk off the siding and down on the main line. This sixth man was short and slight, and save for an unusually dark complexion, was an unnoticeable, detached sort of person to whom the passing crowd never gives a second glance. And all that a second look would have discovered was that the man wore a dark sweater under his coat, that his face was void of expression save for an unreadable line about the mouth, that the eyes were narrow and a bit close together, and that he made no motion that would attract attention to himself. Just a little human cipher, that was all.

The train swung along, slacked itself in a bumping series, caught up the slack by a reverse bumping, and swung on again. At last it halted at a mere speck of a station beside the Rio Grande. It was already late by some hours, owing to flooded streams to the northward, and the stop at this wayside point hardly told off the thump of the caboose against the last loaded car before the wheels at the front were turning again on the journey veering now to the southeast.

As the engine had neared the water tank some distance above the little station building, an Indian rose from the sandy right of way, and looking neither to the right nor left, strode up the track alongside the train, with steady, unhurried

gait. His head was bare. A gray blanket with black splotches woven into it was flung about his shoulders, seeming to merge him into the color scheme of his surroundings. Before half of the train had come to a standstill he had passed the rear car with its six passengers and, leaving the railroad track, had vanished from sight up a trail wandering northward.

The tramp was asleep. The two Mexicans, still far apart, were busily eating bananas. The half-breed in the corner was smoking a vile-smelling cigar. Only the big man noted the Indian stalking up the track outside, and only he noticed that when the train started up again, the little man had dropped out of sight. That was all. At the next station the other five would go their different ways, and probably never touch elbows again. So wide is the land, and so many are the trails in this big America of ours, and so slight the concern of one man's going forth in its effect on the other ninety-nine million, nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine Americans.

. . . . . .

Half a mile away from the station, and hidden from it by a little swell of ground, a dim trail led toward a deserted sheep herder's hut that stood amid scrubby cedar growths. Beyond the hut the rocks increased in size and confusion—and

the trail narrowed to enter a cañon running back from the river.

The man who had left the train gave a quick glance about the place, then followed the trail the Indian had taken, until he came to the deserted hut. Not far away two ponies grazed on a patch of curly mesquite, their long lariats fastened to a small evergreen shrub making a slight scraping noise as they moved about. No other sound broke the silence of the place save the diminishing rumble of the train and, now and then, the swish of the Rio Grande waters. The man stood still in the open doorway, pulled his hat over his face as if from habit, and stared about him cautiously. Suddenly he saw the man whom he had been following sitting on the gray rocks beside a piñon tree only a few feet away, seeming, in his gray blanket with its black splotches, like a mere vivified bit of the landscape with all its colors clinging to him.

The Indian rose the moment he was discovered, a wiry, long-limbed, evidently elderly man, in whose veins ran the blood of no alien race. Nothing in his bearing distinguished him from any other of his tribe, nor a line in his face told whether he was knowing or stupid. The face of the man before him did not change at sight of him, except for the mere narrowing of the eyelids in token of surprise—maybe, as the two looked straight at each other without a word of greeting.

In silence they entered the hut and sat down on the earth floor facing each other. It was now midday. Outside the sunlight was warming, but the hut was shadowy, and the winds were chilly that swept through the door and window openings. The red man drew a letter from beneath his blanket and held it up without a word.

"I wrote it. I'm the man who was to meet you here," the white man declared in a low voice, at the same time spreading a soiled piece of paper on the ground between the two.

It was a rude map of the place, showing, however, with remarkable accuracy, the river's course to the southward, the railroad diverging from the stream, the location of the town of Santa Fé far along it, the station here, and the trail leading up to the little hut. But nothing at all of the cañon that swallowed up that trail beyond it. So far as that map was constructed the earth ended with some sheep herder's forgotten abode.

"I made it."

The Indian's quick nod and flirt of the hand said more than the brief grunt of assertion.

The introduction of the two to each other being completed, the Indian rose quickly and, stepping outside, pointed to the sun as indication of the time of day. Then with another flirt of the hand for his companion to follow him, he mounted one of the ponies and rode swiftly away up the trail into the narrowing cañon.

For a long time the two men pushed on over a rough, dimly marked circuitous way far up a wild, isolated gorge into the heart of the mountains. In the late afternoon they came to a grassy level space in the high-walled cañon. It was a secluded spot, possibly the forgotten habitation of some early settler, a stanch little stronghold, with its bit of pasture, its acre of corn land, wood and water near at hand, with fish and game for hook and trap. On the farther side a well-built little adobe hut with a tiny corral beside it snuggled under the shelter of overhanging rocks. Behind this hut and completely concealed by it, a narrow crevice in the huge masses of rock led with a sharp curve into a small opening before a dry cavelike space running back under the shelving stratum. The curve in the passage thither made an almost right-angled turn, so that even at its beginning one might easily be deceived into thinking that the crevice ended abruptly against a dead wall a few feet away. The interior of the hut showed plainly that this was not the abode of a savage. It was a bit too clean, too orderly, too well equipped. Navajo rugs of wonderful pattern were on the floor. Navajo blankets covered the two rude couches. The cooking utensils, the well-made seats, a wall cupboard with doors that fastened securely, all suggested that the indweller here must either be civilized or had at least taken on many customs of civilization.

The suggestion was more fully verified when the red man began to prepare the evening meal of broiled fish, freshly slaughtered deer, and cakes of blue Indian corn meal, with a pot of black coffee.

While this preparation was going on the white man strolled out-of-doors toward the rocky edge of the little valley. He did not look back toward the hut, but a turn in his way gave him opportunity, by a side glance through the open door, to see the Indian moving about the supper work. Presently he sat down beside the little stream at the edge of the cañon and began to smoke a cigar.

Inside the hut, the other man raked the fire under the broiling meat, and settled the coffee pot more securely on its coals. When he turned toward the door again the man outside had disappeared. The Indian's face did not change, nor did he hasten his step as he set the food out of reach of burning, then noiselessly left the hut by a half-hidden rear door and slid like a snake into the crevice in the rocks behind the house. The white man was already in the cavernlike space under the rocks, searching with quick scrutiny every shadowy nook in its rough walls. At last, high above his head, on a projecting ledge, he espied a bit of tanned skin blanket carefully folded as if wrapped about something to protect it. It was so nearly the color of the rock itself

that few eyes would have discovered it there even in the midday light.

Standing on tiptoe, the man stretched up his hands eagerly. The ledge was too high up for his short arms, though he strained his muscles to the uttermost. As he turned about to find a means of reaching the object, a stone to stand on or a crooked stick to drag it forth, he came face to face with the Indian. For a moment each stared at the other. Then without a word the Indian strode past the little man and, reaching up with his superior length of arm, he easily drew the skin bundle from its place. Unfolding it, he found another skin-wrapped bundle, which he opened. It contained a small, tightly covered basket of Hopi weaving. The Indian opened that and, stooping down, poured its contents on the smaller skin; a jingling heap of silver dollars, cut and uncut turquoises, silver ornaments, and strands and strands of beads of beautiful weaving.

"Want any?" the owner asked.

"No. Put them away," the other man replied.

The Indian took out a silver ring, the finest piece of workmanship there; then replaced the bundle exactly as it was found, saying, gruffly:

"Supper ready. Eat, then talk. This"—with a sweep of the hand to take in the little cave, the opening before it and the hut beyond it—"this is mine. White man's house his castle. Indian same as white man."

This bit of good English from a taciturn, uneducated savage was most surprising. The little man caught his breath and his eyes narrowed in close scrutiny of the face before him.

"Yes, yours. Nobody else has any right here, I see," he said, in a level tone.

The Indian nodded and stalked through the narrow crevice to the hut, followed by the other man, whose face was a study.

After the meal the two turned toward the open fire, with the table still between them, and smoked long and silently. Outside, the full moon filled the valley with a whiteness that made the shadows inky by contrast. A night bird calling somewhere, the cry of some wild thing caught in its hunting, the gurgle of the little stream at the edge of the rocks, the long sigh of the winds through the pines overhanging the cañon's farther bound—all the night sounds of the New Mexico mountains were accentuated by the stillness within.

The white man showed no signs of haste. Evidently his was the patience of one who feels an assurance of getting all that he wants at last. At length the Indian laid aside his pipe and turned squarely before his guest across the table.

"What Indian sells white man buys," he declared, slowly. "You bring price?"

The white man drew a long woven purse from

beneath the sweater under his coat, and, stretching it at full length on the table, untied the strings and emptied it with clink of coins and rustle of currency. The Indian watched the emptying, and the careful stacking of coins and piling of bills afterward.

"Count it," the white man suggested.

The other man ran through the money, computing Indian fashion, quickly but accurately.

"Four thousand. All?" he asked.

"Absolutely all," the little man replied. "Do you sell?"

The Indian nodded. "Wait here," he said, and, laying the money down on the table, rose to leave the room.

"Take this as pledge of good will from me," the white man said, as he drew a full flask of Kentucky bourbon whisky from his hip pocket, twisted the cork to make sure it would come out easily, and handed it across the table to the red man.

The latter grasped it eagerly and slipped away behind the hut toward the hidden cavern. The other man rose at once and stepped noiselessly after him.

"He will never come back till he has emptied it if he is a thoroughbred of his kind. I may as well watch him and see where he hides his goods. That roll of silver and turquoise is too easy to mean much. What I want to see nobody will

ever find unless he sees where that red devil puts it himself."

A wash of white moonshine was flooding the open space beyond the crevice and filling the little cave with a shadowy half light. The man paused in the darkness at the inner end of the crevice, where he could see all that went on beyond him. Out in the light the Indian was standing tall and straight, holding the tempting flask up before him.

"Why doesn't he drink it? Firewater of the best brand and all his own," the man in the crevice muttered. "I can take care of him the minute he takes the first nip. What—the—devil—?"

In a flash the bottle, unopened, had hurtled through the air and crashed against the rocks at the side of the cañon. Then the Indian slid into the little cave. Reaching high, very high up on the side opposite the leather blanket with its roll of silver and precious stones, he drew out a small flat bundle and came out again into the lighted space. It seemed but a few seconds before he re-entered the hut, to find the watcher, in the crevice a moment before, sitting by the table just as the Indian had left him, and wholly unconscious that the red man had held back his own footsteps to give his guest, whom he had seen easily, time to settle himself inside. Clearly this was a game that two were playing with equal skill.

The Indian pushed aside the pile of currency, scattering the coins on the floor as he did so, and laid his bundle down on the table between the two men. Very deliberately he undid the leather wrappings, disclosing a flat metal box, which he unlocked with a key that had been hidden somewhere about his blanket, and lifted out the contents.

Among more or less soiled sheets of paper lay a stiff cardboard covered with markings. Across the middle ran a well-defined irregular black line. All the marks on one side of this were in red ink; on the other side in blue. At the margin there was some notation in a clear, round hand, and in one corner a signature had been tremblingly scrawled.

The white man bent over the cardboard eagerly and studied its every detail. Then he sat back in his chair and drew a long breath, staring at the Indian with narrowed, piercing eyes. A ghost of a grin, a gleam of power, a slight satisfied shrug of the shoulder, and the tall old red man was himself again.

"Is the price too big? I burn." He made a motion toward the open fire.

"For God's sake, no! no! Don't destroy yet. Wait, wait," the other exclaimed. Then he, too, became the noncommittal, uninteresting little nobody, just as he had appeared on the freight train twelve hours before.

The Indian replaced the papers in the box,

locked it, concealed the key again, and tied the leather covering neatly about it. The white man meanwhile bent over the scattered money, gathering up the fallen coins, counting all carefully, and stuffing the sum back into the slender purse. When he lifted his head from his task the Indian was gone.

"Some new hiding place now, I'll gamble. That redskin is a —— wonder, too big to cuss about. . . . Here's your price. Take it," he added as the red man suddenly reappeared before him.

The man took the purse, rolled it tightly, and tucked it inside the bosom of his coarse shirt.

"We buy and sell, but I give you sign of friendship. Ah—ah," he grunted, hesitatingly—"ah—pledge of faith."

Surely this man knew a better language than the Indian of his caste uses. Where had he learned it?

"Take this ring, my sign of faith in you."

Slowly, haltingly the words came, as if the speaker were harking back to a forgotten tongue of other days, or trying to conceal his too ready knowledge of it. Yet he was Indian—through and through Indian.

The ring was skillfully made and dainty enough for a woman's hand. Its silver setting held a fire-hearted opal of unusual beauty, edged round by tiny gold-veined turquoises of softly blending

blue and green that helped to keep alight the opal's gleaming flame. The Indian touched it caressingly and passed it from his hands slowly.

The other man took the ring and studied its workmanship curiously.

"Will it keep away evil?" he asked.

The Indian nodded. "Keep it, it will. Don't give away. Don't tell. You give it to somebody they get *you* by and by. See?"

"Yes, I see."

Then, as if it had just come to his mind, the white man drew the pictured page of a daily newspaper out of his pocket.

"Let me show you something. If you give anything or tell anything, *anything*, a-n-y-t-h-i-n-g" (in a whisper at last), "to either of these, they get you; eternally get you. Don't tell them *anything*, you understand."

The Indian took the illustrated page in his hands and looked at it intently. It contained the portraits of stage beauties, a group of professional men posed at the doorway of some convention gathering, the discoverer of some new electrical appliance, the funeral cortège of some noted man just gone hence, and an American general and his staff in full uniform. There was a heavy pencil mark about the group posed before the camera and about the military group. The Indian pointed at these two questioningly.

"Yes, keep clear of their kind everywhere. *Let*

them alone. Not these particular men in the picture, but what they stand for. Understand?"

The man's low voice seemed to cut the ear of his listener. Again the Indian studied the page. Then sweeping his hand over the picture of the general and his staff, he nodded knowingly.

"Indian understand that, always," he said, grimly.

At the other marked group he looked longer. Then pointing to the two central figures in the garb of the Supreme judiciary, he grunted:

"Indian know that, too."

"Then keep clear of both. You lose the minute you deal with either," his companion urged.

The red man nodded approval and handed back the sheet. The white man spread it out and swept his hand over the bravely decked army group as if to clear them from the map of future consideration. Then with his right hand triangular, like the little table of the ouija board, he traced about the page till his forefinger rested on the face of one man of the other group. It was the face of the well-dressed passenger who had ridden down the Rio Grande that very morning. Again the Indian nodded, but for some reason the motion carried a mental reservation to the man watching him that he did not quite understand nor like.

"Me keep?" The Indian was reaching his hand now for the paper.

The white man gave it over, and the Indian folded it and put it out of sight with the money purse in his coarse shirt bosom, and turned away.

"One question," his companion urged. "Where did you learn English? Who taught you?"

The red man threw up both arms toward the open world and shook his head. Clearly beyond a certain point he was hopeless.

Half an hour later the two men were sleeping on the two bunks under the Navajo blankets. Early the next day they separated at the door of the little sheep herder's hut above the station beside the Rio Grande. They had followed a different trail thither from the one taken on the afternoon before; and neither in coming nor going had they seen a single human being. So far as they were concerned, there were only these two in the United States of America. At the empty hut the Indian, followed by the pony the little man had ridden so far, turned about without a word, and faded out away into the gray landscape with its black-green blotches.

Two hours later, when the freight train took water at the station tank and started on southward again, the brakeman found a man from nowhere in the rear car. Engine trouble, delay on a siding, an unusually difficult load, and an ugly little blizzard, tip end of winter in the mountains, kept the brakeman busy until he forgot all about the passenger. And as there was nothing to mark

this particular wayfarer, in this bit of detached, out-of-the-way region, the railway employee never saw his like, nor remembered him again. Like the Indian in the cañon, he, too, faded out of sight. And that was all.

II

WHEN FRIEND MEETS FRIEND

JACK LORTON met his friend, Bryce Carroday, by appointment in his cousin Cid Jannison's apartment overlooking Central Park. Previous to the day before this meeting the last word that these two men had had of each other, some moons before the signing of the World War armistice, had been the rather indefinite accounting of the one as "killed in an airplane attack," and of the other as "lost at sea in a submarined hospital ship."

On the day before this meeting, Carroday, a young lawyer from Denver, had learned in the offices of Grace & Grace, his firm's legal associates in New York City, that John Fairborough Lorton, civil engineer, whose office was in the same building, was really Jack Lorton, college chum, Canadian training-camp pal, overseas comrade, whom he had mourned as lost after the second battle of the Marne. At the time of this discovery Bryce Carroday was sitting in the elder Grace's private office, gazing abstractedly out of the window.

"What's the matter, Carroday? What's giving you that long face?" Grace asked, noting the young man's serious countenance.

"I was thinking of a young fellow and his little red-headed wife, I judged it to be, that I saw as I came up on the elevator just now. They got off two floors below."

"Why should that make you serious? I've been a married man a good many years, Carroday, and let me tell you young bachelors, that are head on toward being old bachelors if you don't look out, that being married is the one thing to keep a man's face round."

The young man's eyes lighted with a smile. Grace was a genial-hearted man, and jovial in spite of the fact that he had known some of life's bitterest sorrows.

"That's all right for a man like you, Grace—or maybe for any of us, with reservations. One of them is the features of that infernal divorce case pending here, that you have just been telling me about. And another is the trite old menace of ill health. That young husband, whose red-headed wife was guarding with anxious eyes, ought to get away from New York City and go out to my country, where we keep pure air free for some other things besides tourists' automobile tires. Best medicine on earth for building up feeble lungs. This young man will soon fade out here till you can't tell him from the bottom

of the graveyard. He'd have a long chance if he were in some places I know."

"Oh, don't grieve over strangers. There are so many of them in New York City you'd wear out at it," Grace replied, lightly. "I think I know who you mean, though; but it's the wife that interests me as a human study. She's so infernally devoted to her pale, thin husband, if it is the couple I have in mind. You say she's little and red headed, and that they got off two floors down?"

Bryce Carroday nodded.

"About everybody in this building knows her and likes her, and is just a twinge afraid of her, too. She's just what you say, though—devoted, vehemently devoted to that little man of hers, and also to an old crippled father. She's the managing boss down there in John Fairborough Lorton's office. You may have noticed the sign."

The ruddy color left the young man's face as he turned quickly toward the window, and his voice deepened with the pathos that men try to conceal, as he said:

"That's a good name to me—Lorton—a sacred name now. The best man I ever knew, or ever hope to know, was a Lorton."

Grace looked curiously at the speaker. He had not known the young representative of the Denver branch of the firm until this visit, but he had liked him from the first meeting. There

was a wholesome sincerity and stability about him that older men always prize in a young man.

"Well, you'd like this Lorton, too, and you two ought to know each other. I'll call him up right away. . . . Gladys," to the stenographer, "see if you can get Jack Lorton on the line. Tell him I want to see him up here a minute."

"Jack Lorton!" Bryce Carroday exclaimed. Then, calmly, "No, there's only one real Jack Lorton, and he's—gone."

"Mr. Lorton's out of the city. Won't be back for several weeks," Gladys reported, and turned away to her own desk.

"Sorry for that," Grace declared, as he began sorting some papers on his desk, "for this is the one real Jack Lorton. You'd love him, for he's the genuine lovable thing; a New England man, from up on the Connecticut River somewhere; had a tremendous war record overseas; owns a bushel of what the old janitor here calls 'them *croy-de-goys*'; was reported killed once. I don't know how long it did take the military red tape to unwind and admit he wasn't dead. His parents both died while he was in France—"

"Good God!" Bryce Carroday burst forth.

Grace looked up in wonder.

"You mean to say that this is the real Jack Lorton and he's alive?"

The question was fairly hurled at the other man.

"The livest man in all York State—"

"Then he is my man. Oh, thank God!" Then with more self-control Carroday continued: "We were the closest friends who ever left America. I have believed for these many months that he was dead, that he was killed in an airplane attack. To this day, even after all these months, I've never had the heart to look up the aircraft record. He meant so much to me. Where can I reach him now?"

"Get the address, Gladys. This is glorious," Grace declared. "One of the joyous after-the-war things. God knows there are enough of the other kind."

The elder Grace, living a big, busy, genial life, never spoke of his own sorrow, although he had sent out three sons who never came back; one lost in the ambulance service in Flanders; one in carrying a vital message across No Man's Land, "somewhere in France"; the third a victim of the plague of '18 in a college training camp.

"In Ogdensburg, Gladys? Then get Ogdensburg on the line and call for Civil Engineer John Fairborough Lorton," Grace was directing his stenographer with the voice of a man who knows the power of overcoming, glad at heart for this reunion, who would never know reunion himself—this side of the final reveille.

The walls seemed to fall away before Bryce Carroday's eyes, and the floor under his feet to billow like the sea, as he entered the telephone

booth. For a minute he stood motionless, then drew himself up bravely. He was a big, strongly built man—a man who knew how to meet big moments.

"Ready with New York City." "Ready with Ogdensburg." "Yes, there you are." "Go ahead, New York City." "Go ahead, Mr. Lorton," the telephones were chattering as Bryce held the receiver to his ear.

"Hello! This is Lorton. Hello! Lorton," the voice came ringing down the wires clear and strong.

"This is Carroday, Bryce Carroday, talking. Is that you, Jack?"

A clicking as of a dropped receiver; a slamming noise as of something falling against the side of the booth, smashing the instrument; a smothered "O merciful heavens!" Then silence.

"Talking?" Long Distance inquired.

"Yes . . . Bryce, Jack?"

"O Lord! Yes, yes, Bryce! Bryce! But where are you, Bryce—in heaven or hell?"

"Both. I'm in New York City in heaven right now, but I'll be in the other place in a minute if I can't see you. Are you alive? Really, Jack? You aren't fooling me—Bryce?"

"I don't know whether I am fooling or not. I was alive just now. I may be dead by this time. The world is going blooey before my eyes. Oh, Bryce! You! You!" The voice was a shout.

"Yes, me, me. Come on down here. I'm leaving for Denver at five in the morning," Bryce Carroday shouted back.

"Same old liar! Now I know you are alive. Say—maybe I can make it by midnight. No, I can't, but I'll get in by noon to-morrow," Jack declared.

"I have business to use up to-morrow forenoon. How about early after lunch?" Bryce suggested.

"Bully! In my cousin Cid Jannison's living room. Go to her apartments and wait for me. I'll get Cid on the line right away and tell her. If my train is late I'll be down the Hudson on a raft. Here, take Cid's address." Jack told it off carefully. "Good-by, old boy, till to-morrow at Cid's."

"Good-by, Jack, for a little while."

The receivers clicked at the ending of the happiest messages that those wires had carried between the mouth of the Hudson and the shores of the St. Lawrence River in many a day.

The place appointed for the meeting the next day, designated by Jack Lorton as "Cousin Cid Jannison's living room," was at once spacious and homey. French windows looking out on little balconies gave a charming view of the Park and the sunset lights beyond it. Within, the soft gray tones of the furnishings, deepening here and there to heliotrope and rose; the open piano; the easy chairs; the reading table orderly with books and magazines; and the dainty work-

stand—Cid Jannison loved needlework—everything bespoke the room where life means *living*, not staying around till quitting time—the kind of room so invested with the owner's invisible presence that it seems never to be unoccupied.

To-day the sounds from the boulevard came up but faintly. A clock was ticking steadily somewhere near. The fresh spring breeze, bearing the odor of tree buds, rippled back the draperies of the open windows. On the farther side of the room, under the gray mantel, the grate with its splash of living flame was faced by a high-backed deep davenport, a veritable little cave, big enough to hide oneself in. The immense rose-colored shade of a reading lamp behind it gave added seclusion to the occupant therein.

Lorton was the first to arrive. As he entered he glanced about eagerly for his cousin, whom he had hoped to find here, although he knew, from their conversation the day before, that she had an engagement out somewhere for the late afternoon. Evidently the room was empty, although the sense of a human presence near for a moment impressed him with a strange intensity. It was quickly dispelled, however, by the arrival of Bryce Carroday, and for the time forgotten.

The meeting of these two, coming as from the grave back to each other, after many days, made one of those thrilling moments of which life holds not many.

In their college years they had been inseparable. Side by side they had taken, or missed, classroom honors. Together they had been hazed in their freshman year; together pledged to the same fraternity; together fought their way across the gridiron in many an athletic battle. On long tramps across the country, and by the wood fire in their dormitory quarters on winter evenings, they had settled great questions of state, analyzed the psychology of events, passed judgment on social problems, criticized current drama, fiction, and art, confided to each other their ambitious dreams for the future, and revealed to each other the young-manhood ideals by which that future was to be directed. Bryce Carroday's face was an open book. He was practical, analytic, cool headed, dependable; less artistic than Lorton, less sensitive, less lovable—till he was tested. In his college days he made friends slowly, and never lost one of them afterward. Jack Lorton had a stern cast of countenance, hiding the intensity of his nature. For he was a dreamer, artistic, sympathetic, quick to read men's minds, quick to action, to anger, to forgiveness. He was always companionable, making friends easily sometimes, nevertheless, fighting them to a finish to win them to him permanently. Thus these two, so unlike, fitted each other's needs admirably, and their friendship was genuine, manly, affectionate.

Within ten days after their graduation, fired by a youthful zeal to be doing things, they had entered military service as private soldiers, first under a Canadian enlistment. This was two full years before the World War had become America's war also. Re-enlisting later in the United States service, they had risen rapidly in official rank and distinction. But for every military recognition they had paid full price; and only by a very miracle had each escaped the soldier's last sacrifice, one in the air, the other at sea.

But all that had gone into history. To-day there was no assumption of the military official, nor visible citation, about them. To-day they were just two well-set-up, well-bred American citizens, neither of the leisure class nor of the salaried young climbers toward affluence, but civilians in their chosen professions. Each carried, however, the certain definiteness of men who have met responsibility unafraid, and expect to meet it again without ado.

As they faced each other now there was a moment or two of silence; then a warm hand-clasp, a clinging grip of both hands, an affectionate hug. But their first words as they sat down by the open window were simply: "You darned old piker!" "You bloomin' renegade!" followed by a joyous hurricane of questions of each other's habitat, health, and immediate business. This was not reunion for these two; it was resurrection

from the dead; and neither dared to speak at once of what lay so near to words between them. So they chatted of commonplace themes, drifting gradually from these to the more serious phases of their work, philosophical estimates of the times, recollections of other days, their voices unconsciously dropping to tones too low for their words to be heard across the wide room, and at last the exchange of intimate confidences, their old college habit reasserting itself until they knew with joy that to each other they were still students, still philosophers of their own particular school, still ambitious idealists, unsoiled by War's brute force, unscathed by her devils of Hate.

"How's the law, Bryce?" Jack Lorton asked at length. "I mean Law with an upper-case 'L,' not how much income and all that. It must mean tremendous things to a man like you, a man with the strength of the Rocky Mountains in his blood, the sweep of the desert in his vision."

"Oh, at the last analysis, it is like the World War, or any other old war, Jack, always waxing fat on the misunderstandings of men and women and their misjudgments of what is worth while. The longer I live the more set I am in the belief that if it wasn't for these two things, misunderstandings and misjudgments, little or big, there probably wouldn't be any war, nor domestic broils, nor estates to settle, nor boundary lines to

establish. If, as Tennyson says, 'the common sense of most could keep a fretful realm in awe,' we lawyers would starve to death and all the dinky little colonels and big major generals would be compelled to go to work or do the same. And all the women would be like that girl you used to sing about to me. And the strangest part about all this business is that it is made of such small turns, here and there. Remember the old post card we used to send out that said, 'Life is just one damned thing after another'? Well, it's just one little thing after another. Trifles break up homes, smash business, start wars—nothing but unnoticed trifles in the beginning. They seem to make and break all the romance—comedy and tragedy—of the whole show. How's civil engineering in these piping times of peace, or near peace?"

"*Semper idem*," Jack replied. "'Men must work, and women must weep,' all right, all right; but the world, and especially the things of the world, must be kept true to physical form by somebody, or, blooey!—we go back to chaos. I have no fault to find with my line. I just wish I were two men; I could get so much more done, and done right. Bumptious as it sounds when I say it, that is the only way that we C. E. fellows can be happy. Every valley must be exalted, and every mountain must be brought low, according to Scripture, and who's going to exalt or

bring low, with any system, except as we modest engineers plan the thing?"

Light though the tone was, there was a seriousness in the young man's eyes; fine gray eyes they were, under black brows.

"Well, and *do* you ever get it done, let alone done right, Jack?" Carroday asked. "Our work is pretty much the same. But, for that matter, there isn't much variation in human business anywhere. One set of rules fits about everything. I'm holding out against misunderstandings and bad judgments of values. You insist on the necessity of industry and accuracy. On these two commandments of the Lorton-Carroday social status hang all the law and the prophets. And we meet at the same place finally. As to your work as a civil engineer, just when the jury returns the verdict, isn't there an appeal taken by those who never understand the need for building up and grading down; those who choose the lesser good always? It is quite like the law in that. It is the misreading of the signs along the trail that makes the traveler lose his way, not his indifference to consequences. England and France and Germany know that now, to say nothing of the United States. It was that sort of thing that brought me to New York this week. Litigation over some mining land and some boundary lines and some family rows. I found out about the real family trouble mostly after I got here,

though. But it is serious, as such things usually are."

"I suppose all you can do is to let them litigate and sue for alimony and you get your fee. Quarreling over mines and boundaries is the custom these days, and there doesn't seem to be anything like homes any more."

Lorton's jaw was set and his tone was bitter as he said this, but he added, with a smile:

"It brought you back to me, Bryce. I'd bless any old sort of a case for that. It couldn't be anything short of God's good mercies. And besides, you are about the only thing in the world that that infernal war didn't seem to ruin for me. Father and mother both gone now, and the home broken up. Everything has changed front somehow since nineteen-fifteen. You, my cousin Cid, of course, and my work, excepted."

"'And mother, home, and heaven,'" Bryce broke in. "If I did not know you, Jack Lorton—your high ideals, your—what shall I say?—sweet spirit, your ability, and your accuracy, I'd never have prayed God for that utterly impossible thing—to save you somehow from your burning plane when you were six thousand feet above the battlefield; you are so everlastingly much better than you say you are. Something's gone wrong with you, boy. Tell me about it. I'm your legal adviser, which amounts to being your father confessor, too."

Carroday looked earnestly at his friend, whose mental trend he knew by long association how to estimate. He knew, too, that it was self-control, and not a quick shifting of moods, that made Jack turn to him with a smile.

"Who started all this profundity, anyhow? But it's good to know that we are *us*. It's like being back in the old college 'dorm' at midnight, settling things, instead of being up here in my cousin's home on a spring afternoon, with all the awful memory of the record of the years between to carry with us forever. Tell me about yourself, and that girl you called 'Little Colorado' that your long, long trail was to wind back to when your dreams all came true."

Bryce Carroday stood up in the open window and looked out across the Park, ashimmer with growing life under the touches of spring. Then he sat down and leaned his elbow on the cushioned arm of the seat, brushing back his hair with a thoughtful gesture before he spoke.

"She gave me up, too, when that ship went down that I wasn't on."

"Oh, Bryce, what really kept you from it?" Jack interrupted.

"A lady of influence, and she turned a clever trick in the game to do it," Bryce replied.

"Thank God!" Jack exclaimed.

"I did," Bryce returned, calmly, "but evidently the officials didn't. Ladies shouldn't interfere

in military matters—that is, not too much. That's another story, though, and we'll come to the tale of our two hair-breadth escapes later. It's enough that we are alive right now. But as to 'Little Colorado,' word got back to her that I was at the bottom of the blue Atlantic on leave of absence till Gabriel's reveille. She's married to a young chap out there, and they have twin babies now. He is a mine owner, or he thinks he is; he's also a ranchman; lives down near Alamosa in southern Colorado. I've known him a long while and he has always trusted me as his best friend. A good fellow, but hot headed and self-willed; can't wait a minute for what he wants done; one whose misjudgments will be his undoing, I'm afraid. But there's a row on between this young man and his uncle over the boundary between the families' property. They are just alike, uncle and nephew—impetuous and unreasoning. Our firm are the attorneys for the uncle in the case. See where that puts me? That's what brought me to New York, as I said just now. And when I got here I found that the firm members here are having another phase of the family trouble. That's their case, though, not mine. It's all a mix-up and goes down to bedrock, as I have cited hereinbefore—misunderstanding and bad judgment of values. But what I started to tell you is that the 'home fires' don't burn for me in Colorado. They burn for my successful rival, the

unsuccessful party, I ought to hope, in the suit with my firm's client. Lord knows I don't want to do him any harm, for 'Little Colorado's' sake, and the twins' sake, and his own, too, for, as I said, I've known him well for quite a while. So I am holding up the case while I am trying to establish some boundary lines that would go far toward a settlement out of court. These lines depend pretty much on accuracy in surveying and some civil engineering. Jack, I'd be idiotically happy if you could help us out some on that a little later. I don't trust the man sent out for this work, and that part is left to me. This son-of-a-gun, a smooth, inconsequential-looking pup, is playing double—spying for his employers with one eye and for some other party with the other, while he segasuates around with chart and compass. You see, of course, that personally I have no use for the man we are defending. I have my reasons, too—the man who is trying to ruin his nephew, 'Little Colorado's' husband, father of the twins. This uncle, an old lady-killer, married at that, tried to make love to 'Little Colorado,' who was my girl once. She turned him down flat and cold. That's at the bottom of why he brought suit through us against his own flesh and blood. It's a pretty kettle of fish—eels and devilfish and a lot of slimy things, but that's law with a lower-case 'l,' my son."

"Well, you don't seem entirely crushed by your

personal loss in the matter—I mean the loss of 'Little Colorado.' And the lady who kept you off that hospital craft, where is she now?" Jack questioned, with something of affectionate anxiety showing in his face.

"Oh, Lord knows where she is. I hope," Carroday responded, his low voice almost a growl, "I did appreciate her keeping me off that ill-fated thing, although it kept me in France, a dead man to my friends, for many moons. But I was batty with gas in my insides at the time of sailing, and didn't understand who was doing the thing for me. I've thanked her twice formally, three times informally, and a thousand times mentally—but she found me. I didn't discover her in France, and I've never hunted her up in America. She is a married woman. I understand she was out in Denver on business some months ago, but I was on a business trip away up on the Moffat road, and missed seeing her. I have no wife of my own, but I don't interest myself in any other man's wife. I'm not that particular kind of a fool. It may be a common enough practice with you Puritans and thoroughbreds in the East, but it doesn't go with everybody out in the woolly, undeveloped West—not yet."

Bryce Carroday's face was good to see as he said this, and the thrill that one man's manliness may inspire in another man sent its warmth through Jack Lorton's whole being.

"By the way, Jack, all I have said of my business here is between ourselves, as usual, of course. I don't babble professional secrets along the highway, nor love affairs, either. This lawsuit takes on some of both, with the devil's own trickery about it. There isn't anybody around to eavesdrop on us now, is there?" Bryce queried, settling back lazily on the cushion and gazing serenely through the open window.

At his question Jack Lorton glanced quickly about the place, the impression of its being occupied, that he had felt on entering, gripping him again. He stared at the davenport beyond the big reading lamp before the grate, and the foolish impulse possessed him to go over and see if anybody might be hidden there.

The room was still, save for the ticking of the clock. The far-away shouts of children at play in the Park and the impatient call of an automobile came up from without. Down behind the tall lamp shade there was a ghost of movement—just a faint fluttering of a gray cushion ruffle that the breeze must have stirred; and Lorton's unaccountable suspicion of the impossible passed quickly.

"Tell me about yourself, now, Jack," Bryce said, turning to his friend again, "and about that little soldier girl, so wonderful to you in your college days, who was in the Red Cross work overseas. I hope you two are having smooth

sailing, you have been friends so long. I heard that she made a tremendous record in France. I hope the war work didn't break her health."

Lorton was tying up a loose cord in a cushion tassel and did not look up as he replied:

"No, she's not broken down; she is as strong as iron in body and will. I think, though, Bryce, that the war changed all of us, and maybe women do not measure life by the same standards now as in our old days. Not lower, of course, but we do not seem to see things alike. She is a wonderful girl, though, the most wonderful I ever knew, and as pretty as two girls ought to be. But I won't take your time with details about that case right now. It 'll keep, that story will, and doesn't amount to much when it's told."

There was a shade of bitterness under the seeming indifference, and Bryce Carroday knew at once that it did amount to everything with Jack Lorton. He could wait Jack's time to confide in him. He knew he would not have to wait long. Nor did he believe there could be cause for much anxiety as to the outcome, for, sensitive and quick and headstrong as Jack was, he was a keen reader of human nature, and withal the squarest man on earth. And how much alike their lines had fallen. Both fairly successful in war, and able to "put it over" in business, but with only a tangle in love affairs for each that neither law nor civil engineering could straighten.

"Seems like we are just at the beginning of the march, Jack," Bryce said, as the two lingered over their good-bys at the street door.

"Yes, briefs and blue prints do not hold all of our problems. I've a real lot to tell you about mine once I get started. Not time enough to-day. And I'm tremendously interested in that lawsuit of yours, and that uncle and nephew and 'Little Colorado,' for your sake, Bryce," Jack replied.

"Oh, for my sake don't waste time," Bryce urged. "The verdict is given, the sentence pronounced, the case is closed—and no appeal. The court is adjourned. So long, Jack. Yes, every day while I'm in New York we dine together, unless *you* have some other plans. There's nobody here for me to meet or run from. But don't you neglect your country for an old pal."

"We'll dine here to-morrow night. You must meet Cid. She is worth knowing, is Cinderella Jannison, more than anybody else in New York."

"That girl of his must be out of town," was Bryce's mental comment.

"Give me all the time you can," Jack went on. "You have come at a most opportune season for me. Cid's a corking good friend—father, mother, sister—everything to me, but—she's a woman—and there's only one Bryce Carroday. Good-by, good-by. Is that your horn scolding so impatiently?"

"That thing of velvet and plate glass and brass

binding? No, this is my truck," Bryce answered, stepping into a taxi behind an elegant little car with drawn curtains whose chauffeur seemed to be getting impatient for his passenger.

. . . . . .

When Jack Lorton came back to the room he had quitted he walked directly to the fireplace. Facing it, almost hidden in the deep spaces, was a slender little woman, her gray dress with its rose-lined draperies, her pink cheeks, and blond hair in exquisite wavy sweeps, fitting magically into the gray cushions under the rose-hued lamp shade.

III

MISREADING THE SIGNS

JUST before Jack Lorton went to the St. Lawrence country whence Bryce Carroday's voice had called him back—in the time when he still thought of Bryce as lost to him—he had gone to spend a week-end in the old Jannison homestead up on the Connecticut. The journey thither was a familiar one to him, and its terminal an old vacation spot. For, while Jack claimed a Jannison relationship only to Cid, whose mother was his father's sister, the Jannison, Lorton, and Leslie families in New England had been friends for generations. And when one of Cid's uncles, unrelated to Jack, of course, married a daughter of the Leslie household, the three families were all the more closely bound together. It was to the daughter of this marriage, Leslie Jannison, named for her mother's people, that Bryce Carroday had referred, on the afternoon of his meeting with Jack, as "the little soldier girl who had been wonderful to his chum in his college days."

It had been unusually warm for the season,

with the call of spring in every breeze. Jack, who had been held night and day to his desk by some complex engineering problems, had gone out of the city joyously. Never before had the New England brooks seemed so clear, the early grass so green, the forsythia blossoms so richly yellow, the young leaves so like dainty lacework along ebony boughs, the very air so cleansed and sweet.

Many a spring day in his years of army service Jack had thought of this journey. Sometimes in a momentary lull of the guns, when his mind unbent for one brief instant, only to spring back again to the tense business of battle; sometimes when, chilled to the very marrow, he sent his plane above the clouds, hunting vainly for a hole in their heaving masses through which he might catch a glimpse of the friendly or unfriendly earth, depending on which side of the dead line he might be forced to touch it again; sometimes under the beating rain, in the slimy, smearing mud, when days of drear despair and defeat robbed his spirit of its last inspiring urge to play on in this filthy old game of war—even amid such scenes there came to Jack Lorton, the dreamer, the memory of the springtime back in God's country and the gentle loveliness of the New England landscape along the Connecticut.

Jack used to think that these brief, sweet memories came in answer to prayer for the dogged-

ness to hold on. He never knew fear of death. That was only one phase of this monstrous thing—the open door into something a little more strange than all these strange experiences with which his after-college years were filled. So these fleeting pictures of a safe and quiet country came up in memory to tell him that somewhere the guns were not forever booming, but only the song of birds filled the air; somewhere there was not mud that clung, but a firm, clean, velvety sod; somewhere there was law and freedom and rest and the chance to live and do a man's work in the world. It was to keep that "somewhere" inviolate, to hold a homeland clean and sweet and safe, that American boys, his comrades and friends, with smiling lips and brave dead eyes looking up into heaven, were lying there on the bloody battle-grounds of France; were paying then, with their best gifts on a nation's altar, the old, old price to human greed and hate and lust by which humanity must still be ransomed until the Christian peoples shall learn to know the Christ.

And always with these memories came the picture of a face with big brown eyes, a winsome face beneath abundant auburn hair. Jack had seen that face twice in reality in France, but the hair was hidden under a Red Cross cap and the eyes were tired and full of sorrow. He tried not to recall it as he had seen it behind the battle

lines. It was with the picture of the old Jannison farm that it brought him blessing. . . .

Leslie Jannison had planned to remain abroad for two years after the signing of the armistice. But one day when Jack Lorton returned to the city from a fortnight's stay in Chicago—his business was taking him much to the westward now—he was astonished to learn from Cid that her cousin had surprised everybody by coming home unannounced the week before. And now he was on his way to meet her again—the girl lost out of his life since his college days—in that home which had been her home all of her life. Jack lived glad æons of time in that journey up the Connecticut.

The Jannison farmhouse, overlooking the river, was shaded in summer by big forest trees on its lawns and sheltered from the winter blasts that sweep down from the north country by a high granite ridge, known locally as Gray Cliff, that extended along the farm's upper bound. Jack Lorton loved those gray rocks more than any other spot on the whole farm.

The house itself, built by the first Jannison in America, was nearly two centuries old. Its white walls and green window shutters were so thickly coated with "generations" of paint that decay was impossible. Its Colonial doorway, its many-paned windows, its wide halls and high ceilings, with the lines of its broad stairs, all told the

artistic simplicity of those early home builders. In the living room were comfortable settles and quaint old cupboards, and sunny spaces for window blossoms, and gay cretonne hangings; and in the statelier places, soft blue tints, and gilt and plush, and solid mahogany.

The spring flowers always bloomed early in the Jannison woodland; the midsummer grasses were always green in the dooryard; the autumn foliage, a flaming splendor; and when the winter snows locked the New England roads and barred the gateways, there was never a comfort lacking inside that castle stronghold. Here had been sheltered the generations of Jannisons. Within these walls children had learned the first lessons in citizenship; from the early dawn of human ties, the old, old cave-right to a home, its comfort and protection, a place sacred to them and for them; the lessons of liberty and loyalty and love; the great lesson, later understood, of the place and purpose and power of the home life in the strength and defense of a nation, without which bulwark of home life the people perish, the homeland is laid waste.

Here Leslie Jannison had grown up, an affectionate, happy, sturdily determined, self-dependent child. Out of such a home setting, almost before the ink was dry on her college diploma, she had gone to the battle lines of France, and in that maelstrom of fire and death had given

the strength of her young hands to ease and bless. But the young girl who went abroad never came back. In her stead came a woman of experience and knowledge, for whom the whole scheme of society was changed. Loving more than ever the things of home, the terrible tax of war on the homes of France, together with the lack and loss and misdirection in the lives of the little children in her own country, sounded their insistent call for service daily in her ears. And with this the knowledge of the gross immorality that has a part in all wars, the dull ash heaps on cold altars where girls of her rank had expected to find living flame, the loose, fast lives of men and women who sinned and went gayly on to honor and power, the pastimes of a social caste from which her culture and seclusion had sheltered her—gave to this happy New England girl a new angle of vision, making her not less lovable, but far more wise.

But of all this Jack Lorton knew nothing on that happy journey. Moreover, there is always a mother somewhere in the background, by which every thoughtful young man consciously or unconsciously measures all women. Lucretia Fairborough Lorton, of the oldest and finest of New England families, was, in her day, a woman for the best masters to paint and call the handiwork "Portrait of a Lady." It was from her that her sometimes stubborn-necked son had inherited many of the traits

that go to make up individual mental composition. Especially was it largely by her standards that he had unconsciously, maybe, built up a concept of woman's place in society. His were not wholly a reproduction of his mother's ideals, however. The Lorton blood had made him sympathetic, broad visioned, artistic, and initiative. But the keenness of insight, the doggedness, and the inherent ideas of woman's finer-fibered nature came much from the Fairborough strain.

It had been the shock of his life when Leslie enlisted in the Red Cross service and went overseas. After that nothing in the days of the war could shock him much. But he always thought of her in the terms of his mother. The struggle for bigger things, the making of a nation's history, the shaping of events—that was, to him, a man's job. The steady remaking of society, equality in suffrage, the management of large business enterprises, the independent, energetic pushing into the better positions in almost every occupation—and most especially the varied lines of social uplift—frankly these things were not, as Jack Lorton conceived it, for women of Lucretia Fairborough Lorton's type. Of course, there was Cid Jannison, who seemed to have a part in all these things. But then—there was only one Cid—and she had never been other, could never be other, than all right to her adoring cousin Jack. So, forgetting all the changes that the years of the

war had wrought in himself, he was expecting to find only the Leslie of his boyhood remembrance; altogether unconscious of the fact that while he could easily measure men by postwar standards, he was a generation behind the times in the measurement of women, and that to him the best were still of the clinging-vine type.

It was late afternoon when the train reached the village station. Through the car window Jack caught sight of Leslie Jannison in a shining little roadster beside the platform. He had pictured this meeting with her many times, and always with a masculine assurance of his own self-possession. But the cars had been overheated, and Jack was flushed and unaccountably nervous when he left the train. The air blowing fresh from the river sent a sudden chill through him, as if something cold and heavy had struck him.

The same sensation had swept over him once before when an American woman in France, a certain Mrs. Kilwarth, had told him in an incidental way that a certain hospital ship had been submarined in mid-ocean and all on board were lost. Of course she could know nothing of what that sinking vessel carried out of his life, and he never spoke of it to her. In truth, he cared very little for this woman of whom he saw much in France. She was visiting in Paris when the war began, and throughout it held some sort

of high position in its organized councils of women. Jack never knew just what, except that it was a safe, comfortable, and possibly lucrative one. And while many men raved about her beauty, her sweetness, and her modesty, he always felt that there was a flaw in the metal somewhere. He learned afterward that she was the divorced wife of an American naval officer, the mother of two children, and that at the close of the war she had married an officer who had now been made a general. He had heard further, in an incidental way, that the first husband was dead now, although he was living at the time of her second marriage.

But she was a beautiful woman, and the young soldier never forgot just how her red lips curved when she spoke of that ship, nor the wavy line of her fair hair, nor the bunch of violets that she took from her belt and laid in his hand. Even the design on a quaint vase full of roses on the table beside her was clear in his memory. Besides these things all else was black and drear for Jack Lorton that day. The same chill and blackness swept over him now; but in a flash they were gone and he was holding Leslie Jannison's hand and looking down eagerly into her face.

She was not beautiful in the terms of that other woman, now the general's wife, who was lissome in outline and fitted to pastel-tinted settings; but her white throat above the flaring brown broadcloth collar, her shapely hands, her compactly

built body, her clear complexion, the masses of her auburn hair—everything, from her pretty teeth to her polished pink finger nails, from the brown oxfords to the becoming little brown hat, bespoke the well-bred American girl of the year of our Lord, Right Now. But the one most remarkable feature was her large dark eyes—beautiful eyes— that looked you through without sharpness. Jack dropped his own before their direct gaze, lest they should read too much of what this meeting meant to him. Leslie, who noted this without understanding, wondered why. And a vague little pain crept in with the wondering, a thing of which the girl was hardly conscious at the time.

"I am glad to see you again, Jack." There was no hesitancy of manner, no quaver in the clear young voice.

"And I'm glad to see you, tremendously glad."

Jack did not release the girl's hand at once. It was firm and cool and responsive and good to the touch. It flashed across his mind in a curious way that he had never thought of Leslie's hands before. And then he caught his breath sharply as he remembered how great had been the void in the years since they had been together.

They cleared the village and took the smooth road winding through a delicious spring landscape—took it slowly for a roadster's speed. Youth has too many years ahead to hurry. They

were a handsome pair—the one imaginative, high-tensioned, quick to think and act; the other calm but stubbornly determined. By all the laws they should have fitted each other, if rightly attuned. But if out of tune—only they were not, right now. It was all so natural for Jack to be riding beside Leslie again, talking of commonplace things.

"Tell me about your father," Jack said.

"Just as well as he can be," Leslie declared. "Like a man under middle age, although he is past fifty now. His business interests are in the city, of course, but his home will always be out here on the farm, and he will keep an eye on every acre of it. I'm sorry he can't be at home to-morrow, but he had to go to Boston for a week."

"And the boys?" Jack questioned.

Leslie's four brothers, all much older than herself, had long since been settled in homes of their own round about this countryside.

"Oh, I see them all every week. They will want to see you before you go back. Their older children are going to the academy now. Aren't we getting ancient, Jack?" Leslie asked, looking up into the young man's face.

"You're not," Jack replied. "I don't know about myself; don't even remember when I was born. Some time after the Civil War, or was it the Mexican War?"

"I know who will be gladdest to see you," Leslie broke in.

"Uncle Jonas and Aunt Rettie Nevins, if they are still above ground and still with you," Jack declared.

"Above ground! Their kind keep green for a century. Of course they are with us. Uncle Jonas has managed the farm and Aunt Rettie has been the housekeeper almost ever since I can remember. I don't see how either the farm or the house could get on without them. Mother has been gone these twenty years, or more. They were with us before she died."

Leslie spoke thoughtfully. The one great void in her life had been the loss of mother-care through her younger girlhood. It had put into her a longing to help all children which otherwise she might never have developed.

They were passing the country church now, beyond which tall white headstones marked the last resting place of the generations of Lortons and Leslies and Jannisons.

"Uncle Jonas and Aunt Rettie tell me that you have never been up here to see them since you came home from France."

There was something unreadable in Leslie's eyes as she looked up at Jack Lorton, noting again how he avoided her direct gaze—Jack who had always looked the world square in the face. It troubled her now like an expected ill

suddenly realized. And the first vague pain at meeting him became more real, a something come to stay.

"I—know—it, but I see your father often in the city, and your brothers, too, sometimes."

Jack wanted to tell her that the farm meant only Leslie to him henceforth, so much it meant Leslie that without her in America he had already some half-formed plans for leaving the East for Chicago, but something held him back. His face was averted and he was staring at the tall headstones as he continued:

"I am a careless cub—you know I always was—but I love that old pair of trumps. Maybe I can make it up to them now you are at home again. Look at the river, Leslie. Isn't the reflection wonderful? And see all that blossomy shrub stuff beyond it. Whoever made the New England winters, only God Himself planned her springtimes."

Leslie halted the car to take in the scene.

"You must see our orchards," she declared. "They are at their loveliest, and the tulip and jonquil beds are perfectly *jazzy* now, and the pansies are as big as a cat's face."

"Oh, it's frabjous to get foot on this old sod again," Jack broke in. "Let's climb to the top of Gray Cliff to-morrow again. I wonder if that little spring is still in that crack up there where we left it the Easter vacation before I graduated. I thought of it a thousand times overseas."

"I suppose it is," Leslie replied. "I didn't take it with me, although I could have used it a thousand times if I had."

So they chatted as they rode through the late afternoon sunlight, as if it were again just a little Easter vacation from school for these two. And yet between those days and now, how wide away from college dreams their trails had run.

"You are home to stay, now?" Jack queried, eagerly, at last, for the question would not be held back any longer.

"Oh yes — with variations," Leslie replied. "The farm must always be home to me, even if my work now should take me far away much of the time."

Jack looked at her curiously; but she was watching the coming of a line of loaded trucks on the one hand, and the rocks bordering her side of the road, on the other.

"And your variations?" Jack asked. "What can you do out of the ordinary? You gave full service to your country. I heard your praises all over France from the colonel to the K. P. Oh, Leslie, I never can tell you how proud we are of you, nor how wonderful you are to me! I never dreamed you had all that courage latent in you."

There was a faint deepening of the bloom of Leslie Jannison's cheek and her voice was the least bit lowered as she turned to her companion.

"Why, Jack, that's all gone by now! We have

forgotten the service of war. It is the service of peace that calls to all of us. Aren't you busy all the time?"

"Yes, but I'm a man person, you see. There's no call to bind up wounds and live in camps, and all that. I'm working all the time, but it's mainly to serve Jack Lorton's bank account, and a few other things, and I am on the ground, not in the air," Jack declared.

"So am I," Leslie replied, with a smile. "But even if I am only a woman person I am not planning to sink into the soil in a rut so deep I can't get out with my own engine. I don't mind meeting these loaded trucks on the way. I don't want to follow them tied on behind with a log chain. I still have a work to do, an America to think about. If the flag needed women in war time to help keep it afloat, it needs them doubly now."

They were nearing a narrow bridge, beyond which the road made a sharp turn into a bit of woodland. At the sound of Leslie's horn a group of children fishing in the brook sprang up, dodged across the road, and turned to watch the shining little car go by. At the same moment an empty truck, sweeping without signal out of the woods, around the curve, smashed into the group, that went screaming and scattering in every direction for safety. As the biggest child leaped back to drag the smallest one out of danger, the truck struck her, throwing her against the rocks at the

roadside. Leslie's coolness and quickness alone prevented her car from crushing the child's body under the wheels. But as she swerved aside to save it she collided full force with the truck.

Jack and Leslie were on the ground before the speed-mad truck driver dare to speed on, as he had evidently meant to do. To mend matters he began to swear at everybody indiscriminately.

"I never see a woman know how to pass a body. Why don't you drive yourself, you big fool? Ain't your lily-white hands strong enough to hold a wheel? You city dude! I'm in a hurry. What you goin' to do? I want to know," he demanded, damning every word that could carry a profane adjective, as he stood before Jack, big, and burly, and furiously angry.

In the Easter vacations of the years gone by Jack would have come back at this brute with beak and claw, while Leslie would, no doubt, have fled to a safe distance, angry and anxious. Now she was down by the roadside, lifting the injured child's head into her lap, the frightened children standing, awe-struck, away from her. As for Jack, he only stared at the truck driver, then—

"You stay right where you are till we look after this child." This in a low voice. But it was the voice of a commander, and the man who heard it wilted to obedience.

Jack bent over Leslie questioningly.

"It's a pretty bad case. Looks like concussion and paralysis—cripple for life if she pulls back now."

The girl's voice was low and calm, the voice of the Red Cross nurse of battlefields.

"Where does she live?" turning to the group of amazed children edging close about Jack as if surer of protection from him than from this quiet woman whose quickness and self-control in the instant of danger held them speechless for the moment.

At the question they stood silent and open-mouthed, except the youngest child, who began to sob pitifully. It was to save her life that the eldest was lying here now pallid and unconscious, maybe dying, by the roadside. Jack, sitting on his heels beside Leslie, comforted this little one until she cuddled in his arms and hid her face on his shoulder.

"I believe I know whose child this is," Leslie said, presently. "She lives back in the woods off the road about a quarter of a mile around there. We must get her home and get a doctor right away. I'll carry her, and you run to the nearest telephone, Jack. . . . Where is it?" This, gently, to the staring children.

They all found voices at once now, and chorused the information, all pointing in the same direction across the fields to a farmhouse.

"You can't carry that child," Jack urged.

"I've carried men out of burning huts," Leslie said, without looking up.

Jack turned to the little car lopping disconsolately beside the big truck, and motioned to the driver to come over.

"You must make a litter to carry this child home. Do you know how to do it? I'll have to get a doctor, but Miss Jannison can help you," he said.

"I carried litters out of the Belloo Wood, mended 'em and made 'em, too. I guess I know sun'tin' about 'em," the man answered, meekly. And Jack knew that his penitence was sincere.

"He's all right, Leslie. Get the child home. I'll cut for the telephone over yonder."

By good fortune he found the man he wanted on the way—a country doctor he had known for many years. . . .

The three—Leslie, Jack, and the truck driver—met an hour later at the bridge.

"The wheels are all right, but the engine's dead. Jonas and I can fix it once we get it into port. You'll have to pull us home—to the Jannison house, a few miles up the river," Jack declared to the driver, as they took stock of the roadster's damage. "Get in, Leslie. We'll follow a truck, tied on behind with a log chain, once."

There was a twinkle in his eye, and Leslie's cheeks crimsoned as she remembered her own words.

"Yes, this once, but that's because I'm hauling you, you see. If I were alone, now—"

"You'd walk and pull the car, I suppose. All right. I'm the excess baggage. Wait a minute there, man; I'll help you tie that chain," Jack called to the driver.

"Did the doctor give you any hope?" The young man turned a serious face toward his companion as they started on a slow pull toward home.

"Good doctors never give up, Jack. I don't want to think that the child will be crippled for life, but it was a hard blow and she struck the rocks with her head and shoulders. She's young, though, and she ought not die; but to live paralyzed for the rest of her days is awful. Let's hope she will have a big chance. There's a whole flock of hungry children in that little house in the thicket. I think they were counting on the fish to furnish their supper. The father seemed to me worse put out about that than anything else, for the children upset their catch in the brook when the truck caught them."

"What can we do for them now?" Jack inquired, anxiously.

"The doctor will bring out a nurse from town. Some of the Jannison men around here will pay her for her services, I suppose. They generally do. I saw Carey coming up through the woods beyond the brook as we were leaving. I will have Aunt Rettie send them their suppers to-night,

and a little cot from the attic and a few other things. They haven't any spare beds, and the child must be alone. That family needs about everything, and we have so many things we shall never need again. It's awful, the unevenness of things in this world. I don't believe the first Jannison came over in the *Mayflower*. He must have come with Lief Ericson six centuries earlier; and every single chair and rug and cot and cup the family ever had these nine hundred years is stored in the attic up yonder. The thing for us to do, who have no family cares, is to divide up with families who are overloaded, where fathers don't care and children are plentiful and neglected."

"And the child's mother, what of her?" Jack asked.

"She crumpled down like a frosted plant and didn't say a word, but her eyes followed me all the time."

Behind her words Leslie was contrasting the broken-hearted woman back in the bushes with her own care-free self, and she was furious at the injustice of fate. Why should one woman's heart be broken and another live such a comfortable life as her own might be for the mere choosing? So many times she had asked herself a like question in the hospitals in France, at the deathbed of young boys, butchered to make a war-god's holiday. So many times she had tightened her

lips grimly, because no answer came, that she was not conscious now of what seemed to her companion an indifferent manner and an unsympathetic face. "A misreading of signs along the trail," Bryce Carroday phrased it a few days later.

Reading only these outward signs, then, Jack wondered if this could be the same Leslie he had always known. That other Leslie, though self-willed and independent, had been gentle, affectionate, expressive.

"Could it be just self-control learned by bitter experience in the tragedies of war?" he asked himself, "or had these experiences deadened her sense of sympathy?"

He had seen how war had made brutes out of some fine-fibered men; he had not yet studied on how it might affect women. This Leslie knew how to handle the injured child scientifically, and was lavish in her charity; but — why had the frightened little children of the neighborhood stood aloof in awe of her, though they warmed to him, a stranger? It seemed to Jack in that sensitive moment that nothing in all his life had ever cut him so suddenly and sharply. That one could be a skilled nurse, and not sympathetic, a woman, and not motherly toward children, was inconceivable; least of all that Leslie, his ideal of womanhood, Leslie, to whom he had hoped to say many things before this visit should end.

In the intensity of the moment he did not realize that it was not Leslie herself, but the tragedy of the situation, that held the children back from her as it would have held them back from himself under the same conditions. What Bryce Carroday said some days later of unnoticed trifles that make the beginnings of great changes was verified in the trend of events on this afternoon; Leslie misinterpreting Jack's motive when he would not meet her direct gaze; Jack misreading child nature in the awe of the moment; and neither realizing the psychology of their own mental states in that wonderful afternoon to which each had looked forward for so many, many long months. Out of such seemingly small things as these grows heartbreak. Only there are no small things in the universe. The guns to-day that hurl gigantic shells into the hearts of cities half a hundred miles away are not more powerful history makers than the pebbles and the sling in the hands of the young shepherd David long ago.

"Mothers always get the worst of it in a way, I suppose," Jack said, thoughtfully, "yet I've seen men's hearts break when their boys came home—or didn't come. It is an interesting phase of life, anyhow, this home phase—with the eternal triangle of father, mother, and children. To me the only real milestones of civilization are the types of rooftrees that mark its trail."

"Mothers oughtn't get the worst of it. Heaven

pity us if we are to be judged by the average American home; and this home keeping isn't the whole excuse for the creation of men and women, anyhow," Leslie commented.

"No. It isn't all of a man's business, nor a woman's business in life, of course—home making and home keeping," Jack agreed, "not the end of either one's achieving; but, Leslie, after all, isn't it one of the best things ever invented since the first cave man brought home his kill to the first cave woman and the little monkey-faced cave cublets—brought it because they *were* his and he was theirs and the jungle law recognized this *cave-right* to feed them and to fend for them? And the bigger cave-right of the cubs to be born, and *have a cave to live in*—the best and deepest one, not the shallow shabby ones only—and to be loved and cared for? I learned long ago from that old cave gentleman I called my father—not from my mother—she was a Fairborough and tremendously Puritan, you know—I learned, 'way back, that the four-walled drudgery of a house with a litter of children wasn't the whole thing—not the divine intention the old order used to claim for it. And, oh, Leslie, since we went over this road the last time together what have we not seen of woman's worth in a thousand places beyond these four walls, and of her worthlessness, too—utter devilish worthlessness? But that's neither here nor there. And yet, getting down to the

foundations of empire, the old cave-right looms big always. And every flagstaff in the land that's strong enough to keep Old Glory high to the breeze is strong because at bottom it is planted in some American hearthstone. But, goodness me! this wasn't what I came out here for to talk about this afternoon. What do you care for my views of such things? It's been two eternities and a half since I saw you in New England last. And the years between!"

All the hungry longing of "the years between" was expressing itself without words in the young man's eyes. He would not have dropped them before Leslie's gaze if she had turned to him at that moment. Neither might he have kept back the words clamoring for speech. But for that accident, and the truck, and its driver ahead now, blurring all romance—and Jack loved romance—he might not have waited for to-morrow. But Gray Cliff had been in all his dreams of love, and it held its charm unbroken for him. To-morrow—alone—up there with her—he would speak his very soul then. No other spot would ever offer half so sweet a setting for the memory of such an hour.

Leslie was watching the broad track of the truck tire, and the log chain slacken and grow taut with the dip and rise of the way. Evidently she was not thinking of Gray Cliff, for she did not seem to hear him, nor lift her eyes as she said, musingly:

"Your cave theory might work out all right if there were not so many sweet bells out of tune, our whole social system so out of gear. It is one of the big peace problems, this social business, where the homes of the rich and fortunate are shams, and the men and women in them unfaithful; the homes of the poor, a misery; men, brutes, and women, slaves. While I was in France I saw and heard so much of America from friends—" Leslie's lips tightened as she held back her words. How could she say to this big, splendid young man that it was of Jack Lorton she had heard through his friends of a certain type. How could she tell him that she still longed to have him prove these things untrue?

"You asked me back yonder what my 'variations' are. They are these: that 'Whatsoever things are true, and honest, and just, and pure, and lovely,' and all that, according to Saint Paul, I must not only 'think on,' but must help to put into the American life in so far as I touch it. It is time for men to work to more purpose and be truer, and for women to weep less and have more sense, than under the old order; time for opportunities to be equalized—if we are to have a *living America*. I want to first understand, and then help to make a living, bigger, better America. It is the call of the century to me. Earnestly, steadily it calls for the best and highest service."

Leslie's eyes were on Jack now—eyes that

seemed to see to the very deepest corners of his mind. In them was no gushing sentiment, no melting sympathy, no rapt transfiguration, nothing but an intense sincerity of purpose. Jack had never before felt so keenly the power of her personality, the charm of her beauty; and the thrill of it was wonderful.

"You mean to be a social uplifter. It's a noble line, only it doesn't have to be such a 'variation' as to take you far away much of the time. It's up to all of us 'elect' to do a lot more of it than we did in the ante-bellum strata of society. But the business of life must go on, too, and uplifting needn't take one's whole energy."

"To make a success, it must," Leslie answered. "Broken homes, discordant parents, neglected children, poverty, selfishness, and suffering—we have them all with us. We have seen much of it since we left the station this afternoon. Can our country, this big beloved homeland, thrive on these things? I'm glad I am free from all family cares and responsibilities and can live my life and do my work independently."

"It takes a lot of things to make a country thrive, little philosopher," Jack responded, dryly. "New England is full of dying homes and the last of the family, usually a maiden lady, living on in the old homestead alone, knowing that after her comes—obliteration. And yet out of these very homes, in the years gone by, came the men and

women who have helped to shape the nation's ideals in every State of it, and have kept the old flag floating over all of them. Sons and daughters to 'carry on' after fathers and mothers were gathered into the graveyards up here. Why not build up these homes against those down there in the thicket, overrunning with children, all without fish for supper?"

Long shafts of light from the low western sun lay across the landscape, and the white farmhouse now in full view, far ahead, seemed smiling a welcome from every gleaming windowpane.

"Better obliterating than unhappy homes. I'd a thousand times rather help mothers than be helped; I'd rather live alone than apart. I think I am fortunate as I am. And besides, you forget there are other Jannisons, Jim and Winthrop, and Dan and Carey, who can 'perpetuate' indefinitely in the old homestead, if you class me among the hopeless New England old maiden ladies and vision that old house falling to decay. There's Cid alone in her New York apartment, a cliff dweller, nine stories above the surface, comfortable, influential, and happy. Is she one of your types? She hasn't married."

"Maybe she hasn't—" Jack began.

"Had a chance. You think so?" Leslie asked, smiling.

"No; hasn't found the right man yet. Takes time for some folks," Jack replied.

"Did you ever see her out looking for him?" Leslie asked, lightly. But her voice deepened almost to sternness as she went on: "Jack, these theories are all beautiful, but knowing, as we both do, how many men, even in high circles, can break up homes so easily, I cannot be much moved by all this championship of home life. Somebody must begin down at the bottom and plan for better things. Somebody, too, must look out for the multiplying children of the poor that we have always with us, and all hungry for the fish for supper that this truck and my car helped to upset in the brook. Don't you think I'm right?"

Jack Lorton met the girl's eyes directly now, and the flush on his cheek, that really meant a grieved surprise, to Leslie seemed the mark of a guilty conscience. The memory of an afternoon in a Paris drawing-room, that she had longed to forget, came sweeping across her mind. . . .

Leslie had come up to the city for a brief rest in the late winter, before signing for a twelve-months' longer service in the devastated lands that had formed the battle front. For days she had been waging a warfare with a homesick longing for old New England, for the sight of her father's face, for Aunt Rettie Nevins's good dishes, for the sound of Cid's cheery voice, for Jack, always for Jack. Over against these things the pleading eyes of war-whelmed mothers bereft

of all that makes life joyous, the pathos of needy little children, the submissive patience of maimed and helpless soldiers, all brought their silent eloquence that no words can voice. And she was young, and, in spite of all the hardships of the outermost Red Cross posts of service, she was very strong. Never had the sweetness of sacrifice seemed more glorious when the reward of overcoming her homesick longing could make her the blessing bearer to so many empty-handed, hungry-hearted ones.

On this afternoon Leslie thought that she had fought her battle to a finish. She was to meet the officials at dinner that night and give her final word. And she knew now what it would be. The contracts were only awaiting her signature. To-morrow she would leave the city and forget herself again in helping others. An invitation to a charming function had been accepted. For one afternoon she would give herself up to social pleasure. Then the dinner, the business details of her new work, one long letter to her father, a note to dear old Cid—and a message to Jack, who would understand—then dreamless slumber. And then the new day, big with the joy of service. A message to Jack. But—would he care now? Some indefinite, troublesome whisperings had come to her ears that she had wished to forget or wholly disbelieve. She *did* wholly disbelieve them now. They could not be true of Jack.

It was only that he had been successful, and success means envy, whose weapon is scandal. It was a very happy girl that entered the fashionable drawing-room on that late-winter afternoon. It was so good to be a civilian in a party gown again. Leslie was radiant with the spirit of the moment.

"Dear, do wait right here, won't you?" one of the hostesses had urged. "I've promised half a dozen friends they shall meet you. Now please don't get away; the rooms are filling so fast, and these friends have set their hearts on knowing you. You'll stay?"

"I won't budge an inch from this seat," Leslie assured her hostess, as she sat down beside a table in a window recess to wait.

A minute later a little company of American women, with one or two Parisians, pulled some seats together, completely barring the girl's way if she had wanted to leave the place. Leslie sat still and studied the group. They were not of her type and she had no wish to meet them. Nor was she interested in their gossipy chatter, which they made no effort to keep for private ears and which quickly took on a personal turn with a sort of coarseness and freedom of criticism. These women were all handsome and richly gowned, and interesting to Leslie as an abstract social study, until suddenly their conversation became absorbingly personal. Her hostess was

slowly searching out her friends from the far corners of the spacious rooms, and slowly prying them away from the clutches of other groups who were loath to give them up. It seemed hours to the waiting girl before she was rescued from her hemmed-in nook; "a Casabianca who didn't go down, but wanted to," Leslie called herself, when she told Cid Jannison of this day long afterward.

"Oh yes, it was a clear case," one of the women declared. "I do believe that Tellie got married just to go back to that stupid America and be near Jack Lorton all the time. She is crazy about him, and he is a splendid fellow, with such lovely gray eyes behind those black brows. Just a killing fellow. I don't blame Tellie so very much."

"You mean he's crazy about her. She is just his style, and now she's good and married to the colonel, he's safe to make love to her indefinitely, and he'll do it, too. It will be a long-drawn-out affair. She'll never let another girl have a chance at Jack." This from a Parisian woman.

"Oh, you cannot make me believe it's all a one-sided affair. I know Tellie Kilwarth too well. She is simply crazy about Jack. I could tell you a lot of things—but I promised Tellie I wouldn't. It's a mutual meeting of the waters," a third woman insisted.

"Mutual fiddlesticks!" a fourth voice resented. "Tellie married just to be a *colonel's* wife, and push him on to higher honors for her own sweet

sake. Bless you, I know her. Of course she can hide behind a real husband that she's not divorced from, now" (a sort of catty snarl in the tone), "and have a world of good times with a world of young fellows. Those American men are so easy. She never was married for a single purpose, and she never kept *herself* out of the equation. The colonel is rich, and getting richer. Oh, she's feathered her nest first. Depend on Tellie for that. But of course she won't let such a fine fish as Jack Lorton get out of her net. She does not care a fig how many hearts she breaks—at least, her other husband said she didn't."

Would the hostess never come back? One moment Leslie's heart was like lead; the next its thumping seemed to boom in her ears. She hated the women chattering before her and she longed to tell them so. But—

"I'm joyful that I'm not in America right now," a new voice drawled. It was the voice of a woman whose knowledge of conditions was unquestionable.

"What's wrong with America?" the Parisian queried.

"Oh, the 'after-the-war' is going to be worse there than anywhere. The old U. S. A. is headed to the dogs, the very dogs, now, so far as *real life* is concerned. You'll live to see the old Stars and Stripes go to the slummy slushes yet, and not be too gray on top of your heads, either, when it comes. I've just gotten away; had to lie like

Satan to get passage across. I'm staying in Paris till the world gets on its feet again. And when it does—well, look out for a new map. It's sure to come."

Followed then a recital of conditions west of the Atlantic; a mixture of police record, physical decadence, social service findings, and Associated Press jottings, of poverty, broken homes, neglected and orphaned children in city slums, with an *exposé* of political trickery, business weakness, and society madness, inaccurately and irresponsibly asserted, and ending with the sneering declaration:

"That's America. That's the thing they keep calling 'Old Glory's homeland.' It may all go to—"

Leslie did not catch just where. Before her eyes a file of doughboys, ragged, starved, bleeding, but singing bravely, boisterously, joyously,

> "Thy banners make tyranny tremble
> When borne by the red, white, and blue,"

coming back, a thin line of victors, from an awful sector, and over their heads floated the flag of their country. She was seeing a long line of coffins, precious caskets, holding the nameless ones, wrapped in the Stars and Stripes, waiting under the beating rain the order to be lowered into muddy graves, to make, in France, another "spot of soil that should be forever America.". . .

There was no contract for a twelvemonths' service signed that night. The regretted resignation of one of America's most efficient helpers was on file. And

> a ship that's homeward bound
> . . . To the blessed land of *Room Enough*

carried one bright-faced passenger, longing to see the homeland shores, sure in her heart that the boy who had been her playmate, her chum, her sweetheart, was not the creature that these vain babblers had declared. Sure, too, that the America that she loved so much must need her and should have her full measure of strength to build or rebuild into it the things that endure. Whatever might happen about her, her duty was clear, her patriotism a living flame. . . .

The women had not been so far wrong in their estimate of America, it seemed to the young Red Cross worker when the first joy of home-coming was over, and she began to study the needs of the land she loved. She had spoken from the heart when she asked Jack Lorton this afternoon:

"Don't you think I am right?"

And he had met that query with a crimsoning cheek.

"Does she mean me, a home wrecker?" Jack was asking himself. Aloud he replied, slowly: "I think there are highwaywomen as well as highwaymen. I've met a few along the highroad,

myself. I think further—but I won't say that now." Jack bit his lip in an effort at self-control. "I think that these two homes, yours and Cid's, New England and New York, country and city, are types of all that's beautiful and good. The good and the beautiful ought not die. Let's talk about something else. This Connecticut Valley is too lovely to miss, and there is such a lot of it to look at. Leslie, do you remember the Easter before I finished college, so long ago now, when we went up on Gray Cliff and watched the sunset?"

A shadow fell on the girl's face. They had been so care-free, so trusting, so happy that Easter time. It was well for her that she had learned self-control, as the sweetness of that wonderful day came back to her. But Jack must prove himself now. He must clear her mind of the accusations it held. She must not speak too quickly.

"Oh yes, I remember it. I think the war intensified all those things that I suppose we should have forgotten but for it. It was not so very long ago, though, after all." Leslie's voice was clear now and her face as open as when she had said at the station, "I am glad to see you, Jack."

Her shapely hands lay folded on her knee. Jack lifted his own to take one of them, but he dropped it again.

"Can't we go out there to-morrow afternoon

again? You don't know how many things I want to say to you, how I want to get back into the old life of us again. Good heavens! Leslie, it's been a thousand years since that Easter Sabbath. . . . There isn't any sunlight in the world quite like the sunshine on Gray Cliff. You can taste the sky up there, and it's sweet."

Jack's voice was tender now and so full of pleading, it took all the courage the girl could summon not to yield to it at once, but to say, half carelessly:

"Oh, certainly, if we have time and the house isn't full of Jannison kin all come to see you, you belated old prodigal for whom the Nevinses are killing the fatted calf and fattened hens and every other fatted thing killable; and if the weather is good, and a few more ifs. Gray Cliff is a nasty, slippery place in wet weather. See those orchards over east. Just think about Solomon in all his glory, then open your eyes on a New England apple tree."

Leslie was dismissing the matter for Jack, and he knew it.

The sun was very low beyond the Connecticut Valley. Far before them a cloud bank, looming dull and formless behind the granite ridge, was blotting out the horizon line, and fusing Gray Cliff and gray clouds into one dreary blankness of sky and earth.

The next day a steady rain fell. No callers

came to the farmhouse. The Jannison relatives had all dropped in the night before, and it was midnight when the last one left, so good it was to have Jack here at the old place again. All of the forenoon of this Sabbath Uncle Jonas Nevins claimed the young man's time in the barns and outbuildings, in making good the disabled roadster and in wading about the gardens or tramping through the orchards. In the early afternoon the doctor called for Leslie, who rode away with him to the stricken family in the woods, promising to be back soon and assuring Jack that the sun would certainly shine on Monday, when they would accomplish numberless things.

Late in the day Leslie had not come back, and Jack, who had watched the long stretch of road for an hour, slipped away alone to the ridge of rocks. The rough ground was sodden. The stones were slippery and cold. The shrubs, less protected here, were not yet in full bud. The dull clouds parted briefly to let a streak of frosted gold edge their western raggedness, then closed again to drop another thin pattering of wetness on the soaked land.

"Oh, God! the Flanders mud beat this!" Jack muttered, with jaw set and fists clenched. "I wish I could have gone down in that submarined boat with Bryce Carroday. Bless the manly life of him! Will the time ever come when I shall not miss him? There's nothing left for me now

but my work. Leslie's out of it. No use dodging that a minute longer. If we had quarreled we could make up just like we used to do. But there are no barriers like this friendly indifference. She makes everything impossible. She was nearer to me with the seas between us than she is right now. The war got her as it got everything else for me—father, mother, Bryce, everything—except my work. I'll make it help me . . . and, oh, yes, there is Cid. Dear old Cid! If she only were a man. . . . Oh, Bryce, Bryce, I need you so—and Leslie!"

The eyes lost their sternness under the black brows.

"I reckon I am a man still, and the world needs my kind a little. America needs me as much to-day as she did in nineteen-seventeen. If the homeland was worth all that price, rooting deep into the earth, swirling through the frozen air, marching all the ways of death, in heat and cold and hunger and filth—Lord knows if that's the price, then the blessed old flag needs strong hands to-day to *keep* it floating over a strong land. But it needs Leslie's, too. Uplifters, charity workers, God bless them all, of course; but it needs loving mothers in our finest homes, too. And what a home that might be down yonder. Oh, I've pictured it a thousand times with my sweetheart there. . . . We can't see things alike now—and I mustn't interfere in this mission

she's set herself to fill as a great and beautiful duty. I'm just a selfish brute to think of doing it. It was only that I had hoped and dreamed. But—that 'long, long trail' frayed out somewhere, somewhere this side of 'the land of my dreams'; and 'the long, long night of waiting' opens only on a colorless morning."

One big, heartbreaking sigh, and Jack Lorton was striding down the bluffside toward the farmhouse. The telephone was ringing when he entered the front door. Uncle Jonas was in the barnyard, and Aunt Rettie was busy in the kitchen with the Sabbath-evening supper, so Jack took down the receiver.

"Hello! . . . This is Winthrop Jannison, senior's, residence. . . . Who? Station agent? . . . All right. . . . Wire from New York relayed for J. F. Lorton? This is Lorton speaking. Wait till I get my pencil. Now go ahead. . . . Ogdensburg, yes. To-morrow? To-morrow. Work can't wait. Come at once. What's that firm's name again, please? . . . Yes, yes, all right. . . . The signature? . . . Gwin? . . . Yes, that's all right. You'll flag the train for me? . . . Sure! Thank you."

Jack hung up the receiver and hurried to the kitchen.

"Auntie, tell Leslie when she comes back that I am leaving for the Saint Lawrence country early to-morrow. I'll have Uncle Jonas get the little

car out at once. I must make the train in an hour."

"Now, Jackie," Mrs. Nevins began to protest, "and me gettin' this good supper for you and Leslie. I was just goin' to ask you to take the little car and go after her. She forgets everything when she's helping the sick."

"Aunt Rettie, I must go. I'll be back again some time. But this is very urgent and important. It will take a good many weeks, too. And I can't leave it till it is done. It's upstate too far for me to make the city at week-ends. Here is Uncle Jonas now."

And the same protest Aunt Rettie had made had to be met again. Jack was very dear to the hearts of these two old people.

It did not occur to the young man that neither of the two knew of the telephone message and that to them and to Leslie this hurried leaving must appear as a deliberate choice of his own; especially did all three wonder why nothing of the necessity for this hurried leave-taking had been mentioned before Leslie was called away. . . .

Leslie Jannison, having done everything possible for the injured child, had borrowed the doctor's car and was hurrying homeward, intending to send Jonas Nevins back with it by the time the doctor would need it for a distant call later. As she made her way through the wood her face grew sorrowful and there was a softness in her

dark eyes. She wanted to see Jack again. More than ever before in all her life, she wanted to see him. It had been so long since they had really met each other face to face before. They must get acquainted again. He would stay over Monday, of course, maybe longer. He had not set any limit on his visit, and his time was his own, anyhow. He would have mentioned it if he were in any hurry to go to the city again. And he must be entertained at all the brothers' homes, especially at Carey Jannison's, whose favorite he had always been. They could never again agree in many things, Jack and herself, and what she had heard of him in France was not yet denied. But had she really given him opportunity? Wasn't she condemning him without giving him a chance to be heard on his side? She wasn't sure of anything. This girl, so analytic in social problems, did not try to analyze herself. She wanted to see Jack, that was all. . . .

She had covered the rough byroad that twisted among the trees and underbrush, and reached the main thoroughfare just as the Jannison car passed down the way toward the village. Jonas Nevins was taking the slippery road at Jack's rate of speed, not his own, while Jack sat staring straight ahead, his firm-set mouth and the grip of his hand on the side of the car telling without words that some unbreakable determination possessed him. In a minute the car was out of sight

beyond the bend and across the bridge where the accident had happened twenty-four hours before.

Back in the edge of the woods, Leslie Jannison, forgetting her hurry and the doctor's need for his car, sat still until the far-away whistle of the New York flyer told her that the village station-master had signaled the south-bound train for a passenger to the city. . . .

"He couldn't look me squarely in the eye without blushing like a guilty man. What is wrong? Was all that I heard true? And why is he leaving without a word, like this? Well, the country needs me, America needs me. I am sure of my work now. Oh, blessed be work!" the girl at the roadside said, sadly. "I'll go back and stay with that poor mother to-night. It may help me to forget my own heartache if I try to help her lift her cross. Oh, Jack, Jack, why can't I forget the boy you were, since I feel sure of what you are now? And I had longed so much, so much, for this day!"

Five hours later the child died in Leslie Jannison's arms. If Jack Lorton could have seen the loving trust in the one brief flash of consciousness as the dying eyes looked up, all his doubts of Leslie's affectionate sweetness, and all distrust of the need for welfare service, would have been swept away forever. . . .

The passenger on the New York flyer looked at

the rain-swathed Connecticut Valley and shut his teeth in grim determination.

"Leslie's in some nameless grave in France. I may as well accept her as among 'the missing.' This woman is so cold and critical, and full of the doctrine of serving other homes, that she repels me at every turn. No wonder the children were afraid of her. They love the real thing, not this *community* mothering. And, bad as I am, they will always come to me. Well, I have civil engineering left. The war didn't take that away from me. It means industry and accuracy. If I keep busy and do it right, I'll pull through somehow. But—oh, Leslie!"

So, slight as may be the cause, the rifts begin that may separate two lives forever—the misunderstanding and misjudgment, the misreading of the signs along the trail.

IV

THE WOMAN BEFORE THE GRATE

AND so it came about that Jack Lorton, who had left the Jannison farm so hurriedly for an indefinite stay in the St. Lawrence country, found himself unexpectedly in the city again, called hither by a joyous message from Bryce Carroday. After their first meeting and the good-bys at the street door, Jack returned to Cid's apartment again, to find that his sense of some presence near, twice felt that afternoon, had not been a false call.

Cid Jannison's living room was very still as its two occupants faced each other. Jack Lorton, standing before the woman seated on the davenport, was the first to speak. Extending his hand, he said, cordially:

"Why, how do you do, Mrs. Sidol? Where did you come from? Did you fly in through the window? What brought you here? I thought you and General Sidol were going from Palm Beach to —where was it? San Antonio, or Seattle? I've never been able to keep up with your flittings since you first came back to New York."

The woman accepted his proffered hand without rising.

" 'Mrs. Sidol,' and you promised me faithfully, on the day I gave you that beautiful vase of flowers, to always call me 'Estelle.' My dearest friends sometimes call me Tellie. Sit down, Jack. I came to see you."

She did not take her eyes from the young man's face as she motioned him to a seat beside her. Jack sat down obediently, and Mrs. Sidol, leaning back in the angle of the davenport, turned squarely before him, gracefully, catching one little gray-slippered foot under the other knee.

She was beautiful to look upon, with the dainty loveliness of perishable spring blossoms, as she sat there cozily near—one whom the winds of heaven must never visit too roughly; there was something so appealing in her wide-open blue eyes with their long brown lashes, something so winsomely sweet in the curves of the red lips.

"Isn't it enough that I came, no matter how I got in?" she questioned, prettily. "But since you are so horribly practical, like all engineers, I'll tell you that I came from our hotel. I knew you would be here and that Miss Jannison would be out till dinner time, so that we could have two full hours together. I came up the stairs a little way before I took the elevator. I must have missed you going down. I didn't fly in. Never mind how I accomplished it. I go where I want to go always, and I

don't fly about it. I'll not have to be so angelic as to need wings so long as I live with General Sidol. And again I tell you, I came to see *you*. Are you shocked? Tell me right away what you think of me."

The dangerous weapon of a pretty woman is her modesty. Estelle Sidol dropped her eyes and sat looking at her shapely hands clasped easily upon her knee, an atmosphere of womanly sanctity, invisible, but impenetrable, suddenly wrapping her round like a cloak.

"Why don't you answer me?" There was just a hint of command in the voice, but in the blue eyes looking up again there was only pleading.

"I'm not shocked. I'm just surprised—because I was not expecting to see you in the city, let alone in Cousin Cid's rooms. I know her door is open to her friends, but I didn't know that you even knew her. I wonder she didn't tell me you were coming," Jack said.

"She didn't know it—in time," Mrs. Sidol said, audaciously. "I made all the plans myself, before I spoke to her, *and her servants are well trained.* And the other question—we are the best of friends. Jack, what do you think of me?"

"I think, Mrs. Sidol—Estelle—that you are a magnificent little liar. You don't know Cid Jannison from the Goddess of Liberty Lighting the World, and she doesn't know that you are here, if her servants do," Jack said, smiling frankly at

her glib speech; and, leaning back in his own corner, he thrust his hands in his pockets and sat staring at her.

"Then you aren't glad to see me, after all, and I had such a good reason for coming." Mrs. Sidol, ignoring his declaration, leaned back again and looked thoughtfully into the fire. Evidently it was her gift not to make her admirers uncomfortable.

A sudden sweep of the late afternoon sunshine across the room fell on her, revealing the lustrous richness of the golden waves of her hair. Jack Lorton wondered why the light, that came only to enhance her radiant beauty, should be so pitiless sometimes in its revelations of other women's homeliness.

"Yes, I am glad to see you, Estelle; I am always glad to see you," he declared. "You are living art to me—the exquisite incarnate. And I'm eager to hear your 'good reason' for—ahem—house breaking. But, little Lady Sidol, I've had such a wonderful day with the man I love best, I'm still full of it. The man I had thought was lost at sea, months and months ago. My dearest old chum, the best fellow who ever drew the breath of life. The man whose body I've seen in my dreams drifting aimlessly about, leagues and leagues under the seas. You know they say that those drowned in the ocean may never go to the bottom—gravity and all that plays such a big part. Well, this man

called me yesterday with his own living human voice, on the long-distance telephone. Long distance from the very edge of a watery grave. I was away upstate near Ogdensburg, figuring on a bridge-construction situation in a road-building project up there, and had just driven into town when the phone caught me. Well, you mustn't mind if I say that the day's been glorified for me, and I'm so happy in Bryce Carroday's resurrection I'm not quite down to earth yet."

Jack was too absorbed in his own theme to note the sudden angry flush on Mrs. Sidol's face, the flash of fire in her blue eyes, or the tremor in her voice as she asked, quietly:

"Are you too happy in this friend to think of me? I need you so, Jack, that I came to you. You are so big and strong and happy, while I am the most wretched woman living."

She leaned toward the young man now, with her sweet face pale and her eyes full of sorrow.

A moment ago he had called her a magnificent little liar because he thought he knew Estelle Sidol—a woman of many love affairs, who had interested him only in a general way; a woman who made no moves on the checkerboard that did not count distinctly for Estelle Sidol. But with her beside him here, with her pleading voice and appealing presence, his sympathy rebuked his colder estimate of her.

"What can I do for you, Estelle? You, who

have wealth and admirers and beauty?" he asked, gently, taking her hand as he spoke.

It was only a sympathetic, brotherly touch, and the woman knew it and withdrew her own hand instantly. Clearly, in her world there were no brothers and sisters.

"What's money? The most miserable people that I know are multimillionaires; and admiration and beauty mean jealousy and envy," she declared, bitterly.

"But you have social distinction, also, and you are a general's wife, too, now. It wasn't so very long ago that a general looked tremendous to me. Some of them do yet—Pershing and Foch, and, over here, General Leonard Wood. And a general's wife— Well, Bryce and I—"

"A 'general's wife!' " Mrs. Sidol mimicked. "General Sidol is not a Pershing, nor a Wood. There are generals *and* generals; some big, some very small; and their wives are too often neglected creatures, supposed to sit around in hotel rooms while their husbands fling off on all manner of gay larks—as they call it; and that is the softest term, for the real brand of their sporting is unnamable."

"But, Estelle, you could have a home of your own if you didn't prefer the hotel, yourself; and you have your two sons. Children help to make a home complete, I am told."

Perverseness and inconsistency are a pretty woman's license.

"A home!" Mrs. Sidol exclaimed, scornfully. "With all the cost of upkeep, a house, with all the horrible responsibility of servants spying and tattling! Homes make slaves out of women. We have outgrown them at last, thank God! And who, with any youth and beauty, ever wants to wear out, and get wrinkled and sallow and stooped and old at thirty, just to keep a home and bear children and be neglected and forgotten? Where would I be now if I had tied myself down with those two children of my first husband's? The war was a perfect godsend to me. It kept me abroad just when they were at their worst to care for. I left them with their father's maiden sister, while I held a nice official position in Paris. That's what maiden sisters are for. And I really had a splendid time."

"*A splendid time!*" Jack Lorton's eyes were open, but he was not seeing the beautiful woman in this beautiful room. He was seeing the blazing skies in a terrible booming. He was in a burning plane, hanging over battlefields mad with carnage. "*A splendid time!*" The trenches in the midnight rain and filth and mud; the second Marne; the Argonne Wood; the blackened faces of dying men; and in his ears the death-choked whisper, "God bless my mother." "*A splendid time!*"

"The boys are to go to a military school as soon as possible," Mrs. Sidol was saying. "By the

time they are through college they will be clear out of the way. And how proud they ought to be of a girlish-looking mother, who may be just as attractive as a young girl, or even more attractive, to their college chums and young-men friends. I shall live with them then. But now—oh, Jack, you ought to know what all women want."

"Not being one, yes," Jack Lorton commented.

Then a silence fell between them. As he looked at the woman beside him the young man wondered just how much of a type of woman she might really be. In common with other soldiers in France, he had seen many types, from the glorified angel of mercy to the sordid devil of lucre and lust. And like most soldiers, he had wished to forget the most that he had seen. The longer he was away from America the more he deified American women. The shell-shock aftermath to him, as it had been to thousands of home-coming boys, had been to find how the type of hair-bobbed, rouge-cheeked, cigarette-smoking girl had multiplied in numbers in his absence. Jack never could overcome the fact that he was New England born, and the Fairborough Puritan blood of his mother's stock was in his veins. Even Leslie, who had meant so much to him *once*, seemed now so far and away from the girl of his younger picturing. The woman beside him here was of still another type—a wife and mother, rich, socially distinguished, sweetly beautiful—"*had had a splendid*

time in France," and was come to him now, pleading for a life of splendid times, that all women must crave. And yet, he swore softly but vehemently under his breath that,

> Neither the angels in heaven above
> Nor the demons down under the sea

would ever move him to accept her as exponent of womanhood for him; not so long as Cid Jannison walked the sod of his native land. There was a type, unselfish, cultured, broad minded, patriotic, the very Stars and Stripes of his loved flag must love her as the real all-American woman, God bless her! He would befriend Estelle Sidol, of course, as a gentleman is in duty bound to do. But—

"Jack, I'm in trouble, and all the things that you *say* I have do not help me one bit. But *you* can help me."

"What is your trouble, Estelle? You said you came here to tell me. Do it," Jack urged, the recollection of Bryce Carroday's words, "misunderstandings and misjudgment of values—without these there would be no wars or divorces," coming back to him insistently.

"It's the general, Jack. He's so horribly jealous of me, and"—Estelle Sidol's voice dropped to a lower tone—"I can't help it that I do not think of him as—as some women pretend to think of their husbands. I need your help and sympathy now,

Jack, to tide me over a dangerous sea. You are my friend, aren't you?"

It was Mrs. Sidol who took Jack's hand now and held it. And though he might give her only a big brother's grip, it is hard for a man to see a pretty woman grieving and not be moved. Chivalry plays such a large part in the game then.

"Hasn't the general given you plenty of cause for jealousy? There is some comfort in that kind of justification," Jack declared.

"Oh, who ever thinks of that in a man? It is what we wives have to expect. It is only when *we* grow tired of neglect that trouble comes. Oh, Jack, Jack!"

There was a swishing of window draperies as the hall door opened and closed breezily, a quick footstep toward the mantel, a sudden pause.

Jack Lorton's head and shoulders rose above the back of the seat, but the slight form of his companion down among the cushions could not be seen.

"Why, Jack Lorton," a clear young voice exclaimed, "where did you come from? Did you fly in through the window? I thought you were doing time upstate. You rushed away from us in such a hurry, without even a decent good-by to your hostess. Whatever could have brought you back?"

Mrs. Sidol had only a moment in which to grip Jack's hand imploringly as she murmured: "Please,

please, Jack, don't tell anything I've said, and do let me see you again soon. I must."

Jack returned the pressure of her hand with mechanical assurance as he rose quickly to meet the newcomer, whose hand he grasped eagerly. Mrs. Sidol also rose and stood beside him, quiet, graceful, gracious. Surprises seldom caught this woman of many experiences unready. Approachable, but never readable, she knew how to control situations, and she never tried to win a point by making people unhappy unless the purpose required it. She had other means for doing that. In fact, her resourcefulness along that line was marvelous. Once the general in a fit of rage had said to her:

"If the Entente Powers had only made you commander-in-chief, you'd have had the Kaiser and Ludendorff and Hindenburg killing one another on your account, and every other damned Hun licking your shoes and swearing allegiance to the Stars and Stripes and begging America to let Germany pay the whole cost of the war for your sake, you are so infernally pleasant."

All of which exaggeration may not have been an unfair estimate of Estelle Sidol within her own kingdom. Certainly, of the trio in Cid Jannison's room now, this woman of the world was easily the commander-in-chief. Jack Lorton's admiration for her ingenuity was at high tide at that moment, she knew so well how to make her silence speak

for her as her quick eye measured the girl before her.

"This is Mrs. Sidol, a friend of mine who has just come to the city from Palm Beach. Miss Jannison, Mrs. Sidol. I'm mighty glad to see you again, Leslie. Sit down, both of you."

Jack had not released the girl's hand through this introduction, nor did he do so until he had led Leslie Jannison to a seat beside Mrs. Sidol. Then he drew up a chair and planted himself before them.

Two things were clear to the older woman in a flash; that Leslie Jannison, with a show of engaging simplicity, would be a foeman worthy of her steel; and that Jack Lorton did not need, or thought that he did not need, anybody else in the world if this Leslie (Mrs. Sidol had supposed at first that this was the Cousin Cid whom she had never seen) were only beside him. And the armistice was annulled and the Hindenburg line was refortified then and there. Jack Lorton was too fine, too handsome, too much worth while right now, too necessary to Estelle Sidol's present plans, to be lost. Added to this, the winning of a man from the woman he thought he loved, especially if the woman loved him, made any day worth while to General Sidol's wife.

"You two ought to know each other," Jack said, by way of beginning, and then, as Leslie's eyes met his, he knew that he had said the wrong thing.

"She knows that they oughtn't, and she knows that I know it. Could they ever have seen or heard of each other in France? Lord! there's no telling what women know. They don't act just like strangers here, somehow. I've never fooled Leslie yet," was his mental comment, as he threw a challenging glance at Mrs. Sidol. "I guess I'll let Estelle run things awhile. She couldn't do worse."

"Mr. Lorton—Jack—and I are old friends, always meeting up somewhere, no matter which side of the ocean we are on," Mrs. Sidol said, pleasantly.

"I'd prefer the bottom side, as far as she is concerned," Jack declared under his breath.

"I got back from Florida only the day before yesterday, and, as usual, we had found each other by this afternoon. This is a beautiful place for a rendezvous. I am so fond of these gray and heliotrope shades. They seem to fit me, perfectly."

That she fitted them perfectly also was not lost on either one of her listeners.

Just then the clock struck five.

"I must be going. My car was to call for me at five. No, you shall not go down with me. Please don't," Mrs. Sidol protested, prettily, as Jack rose to accompany her. But Jack was insistent.

"I'll be back in a minute. Please wait for me," he said, in a low voice, as he passed Leslie and, ignoring Mrs. Sidol's further protests, went with her to the street door.

She paused beside her car—the same handsome little coupé, Jack noted, that had been calling complainingly even before Bryce Carroday's departure—and turned a white, sad face toward the young man.

"Jack, you could not be so cruel as not to help me. And remember, I shall trust your honor not to tell anybody what I have spoken of to-day. I must see you again soon and explain everything. The clouds are gathering. Don't fail me now."

"Well, we will hunt for the silver lining they always boast of carrying. I'll be glad to do everything possible," Jack assured her.

"I never ask the impossible thing." Estelle Sidol's smile was bewitching as she turned and entered the car, closing the door quickly behind her.

Jack stared after the coupé until it was lost in the Park drive. He had not answered Leslie Jannison's question as to how he happened to be here instead of following that important piece of engineering up in the St. Lawrence country. But Mrs. Sidol had answered it for him. Leslie was not a girl to be lied to, even by Estelle Sidol. What must she think of him!

"If it wasn't for misunderstandings and misjudgment of values there would be no more wars or divorces." Bryce Carroday's words came back to Jack Lorton as he waited for the elevator on the street floor. "I can't betray Estelle's confidence

that she has thrust on me, worthless as it is. Oh, Leslie, men aren't the only ones who misunderstand! I'll go up now and try to make her see things. She's such a sensible girl. But that overseas business has so changed her old way of thinking, I don't feel sure of anything about her now. I'll do my best; that's my limit. Once she knows Bryce she will understand why nothing could keep me out of New York City to-day."

When Jack returned to the living room, Leslie Jannison was sitting on the stone balustrade of the little balcony outside the open window, watching the sunset lights above the Park. As he glanced about eagerly he caught side of Cid Jannison's head by the reading lamp before the grate.

"Cindereller!" he cried. "Where is the secret passage and the loose panel? How do you women get by me like ghosts, I'd like to know? I came here this afternoon to meet my old sweetheart, as you ladies say, best old scout in the world, and here comes"—but he was in honor bound to say as little as possible of Mrs. Sidol just now—"here you come in on a streak of sunshine, by lightning-rod express, or somehow."

Jack did not ask the real question that was uppermost with him. He had asked Leslie to wait for him, and she was gone.

"I just got in. I was calling on a neighbor two floors below. She's leaving the city soon. That means a new tenant. One is coming in to-morrow.

I must have missed you on the elevator," Cid replied.

"Old stuff," Jack mentally concluded. "Too much repetition here. Leslie asked me exactly what I had asked Estelle, about flying in through the window; Cid gets by me on the elevator, just as Estelle said she got by me. We not only move in circles, we think that way. It's making a wheel out of my head. I'd like to tell Cid everything right now, but I mustn't; and yet if Estelle Sidol tries to tangle me up—and the Fates seem helping her every move—I know Cid can untangle just as fast. I'm not going to be a corner in an eternal Sidol triangle, and that's the game, I'm sure, to get out of something or other that doesn't concern me. I could love a woman that didn't love me, but she must be a *Woman*."

"Jack, why do you stand there in the middle of the room? Come and sit down till dinner is served. Leslie came down from the farm this afternoon. She's around somewhere. Her appetite will bring her in when the dinner gong sounds. You can always bank on a New England appetite." Cid Jannison was standing beside Jack Lorton now, and he smiled down upon her almost wistfully.

"I can't, Cid. I have a dinner engagement with my best beloved. To-morrow night we have invited ourselves to dine here with you. I'll tell you about it later. Good-by, Cid. Stars be good to you!" and he was gone. . . . .

Out on the balustrade Leslie Jannison sat looking up at the pale-blue sky.

"His old sweetheart? A general's wife! The one I heard about overseas was a divorced woman who had married a colonel. Could this be the same woman? Military titles grow overnight sometimes. That wasn't the type of girl the Jack Lorton I used to know admired. Now he is an honorably discharged military officer, and a social lion with the type who marry often in order to keep their freedom for their kind of flirtations. And we women of my Red Cross unit walked the straight, clear line of duty over there when sometimes the very gates of hell seemed ready to prevail against us. We must get accustomed to changed ideals, that's all. If I could only tell Cid all about this. But I can't and not tell her what I don't want her to know about Jack."

V

"A SCRAP OF PAPER"

BRYCE CARRODAY had an afternoon off, which he planned to spend with Jack Lorton. To-morrow Jack would be out of town, called up north as a witness in a damage suit over an automobile accident that had fatally injured a child. He might not get back to the city until Monday. And time was so precious to these two men now; for Denver was already wiring Bryce to speed up the New York end of the business, while the St. Lawrence country needed John Fairborough Lorton to look after that bridge matter if he meant to do it at all. And however much of a dreamer Jack Lorton might be, John Fairborough Lorton must never let any business matter go half done.

The dinner at Cid's had been postponed until this evening on account of Bryce's business complications and Cid's many social engagements, and the two friends were happily to have several hours together.

Bryce had come down to Lorton's place early in the afternoon, only to find a message, instead of

Jack, waiting for him in the private office. It ran:

> DEAR BRYCE,—Had a hurry-up call from Cid. Suppose she's out of baking powder, or wants me to bring an extra chair for the table to-night. Darn the wimmenfolks! Darn everybody, except you, Bryce. Back as soon as possible. Going up Pikes Peak has nothing on getting uptown in N. Y. C. when you are in a hurry. Wait for me, Beloved—
>
> Your only—
>
> JACK.

"So the old horse thief has jumped me to run errands for this Cid. Is it the way of women to be always blocking the game (they never seem to get a line on the value of a fellow's time), or am I gone crazy on this point, or is it just Jack's infernally good heart? I guess Grace, senior, is right about married life keeping a man's face round. Anyhow, my single life in New York is lengthening mine daily. If this legal matter, with that divorce fuss, combined with the demands of Jack's womenfolks, keeps up, I'll be stepping on my chin before I see Denver again."

So Bryce mused as he sat staring at the message that he had crumpled and flung across the table toward the empty waste basket, wondering, meanwhile, how many golden minutes were being spilled while he waited.

He had just come from a late, heavy, and too-hurried lunch. The afternoon sunshine was full

on the office windows, where the drawn blinds shut out the glare. The building had the overheat that follows the chilly morning's warming. The chair was very comfortable. Bryce felt tired, drowsy. He closed his eyes a minute and leaned back to wait, and to *not* think of anything for a little while. . . .

In this brief interval Lorton's office maid-of-all-idleness, whose one efficient side line was that of attending to other folks' affairs exclusively, had thrust a caller through the door into the private office, and then retired to her own private listening post in the middle room, where she could command both inner and outer doors, and by a gently revolving screen could be retired from view herself whenever she chose. Right now she chose to keep watch on the inner door through which she had just ushered a caller.

"Her kind ain't needed in this here business," the girl commented, shaking her small head till its bobbed red hair took on the outlines of the wild man of Borneo, and crossing one leg over the other knee to the advantageous display of gray-silk hosiery. "They ain't needed round John Fairborough Lorton's shack, by golly! and I'll bet a potato they don't stay round here long when the 'Big Sister' gets into action. She's that same fly's been buzzin' round that law office two shelves up; quicker 'n a snake, though. Gladys up there was tellin' me all about her down to Child's this

noon. I'll lamp her trail." This with another vehement shake of the brilliant head.

Her monthly pay checks were made to Mrs. Janis Gwin, but Jack Lorton called his office girl "Live Wire." She was not only metallic from her copper crown to her steel-buckled gray suède pumps—little, lithe, hard as iron, with glittering points in dress and face and voice;—she was also "live" as an electric battery, a queer mixture of shrewdness, inquisitiveness, audacity, accuracy, and loyalty.

Jack had come upon her by accident one day when a policeman's careless blunder had caused her to endanger her own life in order to help her crippled old father at a crowded crossing, and then the policeman, with a sneering grin and a gibe at the idiotic stupidity of women in general, had gruffly ordered her to move on. Instead of obeying, the girl held back, biding her time till the officer had a minute's leisure. Then like a little sharp-clawed bird she flew at him. Jack waited and listened, ready to defend her from further rudeness if need be. The attack was as fierce as it was short, ending with the stinging words:

"It isn't just my old daddy I'm thinking about, either. He's got me to take care of him. It's the old folks who haven't anybody to help 'em past corners like yours, bossed over by thugs with policemen's stars on their coats. Come on, daddy."

The girl put an arm lovingly about the trembling old man, and turned away from the big shame-faced officer swearing under his breath.

The streets were slippery, and, as the old man floundered with shuffling feet, Jack caught his arm and helped him along the crowded way to safety.

"You must be careful, lady; it's a nasty day for old folks to be out," Jack admonished, as he turned to leave the pair.

"I know it, mister, but daddy can't be alone at home for a little while, now. We buried mother day before yesterday. So I take him with me, and it's a long way to my job."

The bright eyes looked bravely through tears, and the little head with its bobbed red hair was held high.

Jack Lorton was little given to the wholesale sympathy that soon drains dry the heart and purse in the tragic calls of a big city. True, it was inherently impossible, in a nature such as his, for him to run through any day without some kindly act, some ready sympathy, unconsciously bestowed, and forgotten the next minute. He was so much in love with life. But he did not understand, nor appreciate, until long afterward, the leadings of the moment on that raw, gray day, when the unimportant incident of crowded street-crossing had caused him to show a trifling courtesy toward a crippled old man and his devoted daughter.

"What is your job?"

Jack didn't know why he turned back to ask this question.

"Oh, I never did know anything but office work. Good work, though, if you do it right."

Lorton's office force just then was exasperating him to the point of desperation just because it was good work not being done right.

"Where are you employed? I hope they appreciate your idea of work," Jack said.

"Oh, they are a mighty nice firm to work for, but they may have to cut some of us off pretty soon on account of business slump," the girl replied, giving the address of her employers, a firm well known to the young man. "Come on, old daddles; we must get along. Thank you so much, mister."

Jack lifted his hat and went his way.

Two days later the office girl's careless destruction of some valuable drawings that had cost unusual effort to produce brought things to a crisis at once. Then the young engineer recalled the forgotten incident at the street crossing.

"That little firebrand said her firm was about to reduce its force. They have the right idea of help. I'll try them," he thought, as he took up the telephone.

"Lorton? . . . Yes . . . . Yes, we are reducing, sorry to say," came the reply to his inquiry. "Can send you a good girl, in a way. She's sort of peppery, very knowing, very inquisitive because

she just wants to know. But you can trust her word and her work from Tuesday to eternity. Her name's Gwin. She's married. Has a sickly little husband and a crippled father. Just lost her mother. But *she's* alive, Lord bless you! she's alive, and you can trust her not to beg any sympathy because she carries a big load. It's our rule to cut off the married women first, and we were a bit worried about Mrs. Gwin because she's too much of an electric shock to be popular most places."

"Send her over here," Jack Lorton returned. "If it's the girl I have in mind, I believe I know her slightly. I'll try her out, anyhow."

So it had come about that Mrs. Janis Gwin was installed in the office of John Fairborough Lorton. She soon knew everything that transpired there, and most of what went on in the building; and she used her knowledge as best pleased herself, regardless of cost. But she was absolutely reliable and the soul of loyalty; first, to her one and only husband, a slight, frail creature whom she idolized and whom she always called "Peter Rabbit"; and, secondly, to John Fairborough Lorton, whom she dubbed "Big Sister." Intuitively she read the gentler side of his nature, and intuitively she knew that such a nature sometimes is an easy prey to the type of women whom she hated, vampires subsisting on human blood. Her scent for these was keen, and she never made a

mistake in the trail of one of them. She had seen her employer put to the test and she knew his strength and cleanness from every other angle. On the afternoon that Bryce Carroday came into the office she scented trouble in the presence of the daintily garbed and insinuatingly gracious personality of this caller. So she sat with her sharp-pointed steel-blue eyes on the door of the private office.

"Uh, huh, good stuff! One of these days I'm goin' to write *the* great American novel. Not that bran mash we get such a lot of where some woman and some man marry somebody else just to find out they oughtn't have done it, and they go on makin' love to each other on the sly till the auto goes over the embankment, or the ship sinks, or the trench fire gets one, and the other goes beautifully on to page four hundred sixty three, 'cause that's as far as the book goes. If that's American life, give me liberty or give me death. I'll just put folks like 'Big Sister' in the G. A. N. I'm goin' to write; real human beings with hearts in 'em. And for the first-class villain some woman like that Sweetness purrin' in that room this minute. But here's what! If that little yegg-woman's goin' to bust the combination and blow up that big man's heart in there, I'll be the mounted police on the spot, likewise the burglar alarm. Not goin' to have this place littered up with that kind of *debbree*," she declared, as she

mechanically dabbed her nose with a powder puff.

Inside the office, Bryce Carroday's eyes snapped open, and he fairly shot himself into wakefulness, sitting bolt upright, clear headed, alert, in a twinkling. Across the table from him sat Estelle Sidol, all modishly clad in a soft gray-green something; the personified spirit of Spring, dainty, colorful, with the tinting of apple blossoms and the sweet odor of violets; a wonderful vision for any man to open his eyes upon. One gloved hand rested lightly on a neat pile of manuscript held down by a crystal weight; the other hand, ungloved and hidden, was deftly folding the crumpled note in Jack Lorton's handwriting and slipping it into the deepest pocket of a spring coat.

The young man rose and offered a friendly hand to his caller as he exclaimed:

"Well, well, Mrs. Sidol! You take me by surprise! How do you do? It has been many a blue moon since I saw you last."

The voice was deep and resonant, and there was a certain rugged magnetism about the man, Bryce Carroday, that his college years had never revealed.

"Very nicely, Mr. Carroday. I am so glad to find you in, for I want to have a conference with you," Mrs. Sidol said, pleasantly, motioning Bryce to be seated again.

"But I'm not in. This is my friend Lorton's

place. Come upstairs to our offices, where we won't be interrupted." Bryce was all matter-of-fact and strictly professional.

"Oh no! Let's stay here. The office girl tells me that Mr. Lorton is out for the afternoon—won't be back for a long while, at least. And it is because you were here that I came to see you today. I don't want to go to your offices. Surely you can understand why I would not want to see you there! Please don't allow us to be interrupted. I shall not leave, now that I have found you alone . . . Bryce."

This way ran the danger line; the softly pleading voice, the fair face, the deep-blue eyes looking up in trustfulness, the call for chivalric aid.

" 'The time of the truce of the Bear.' Look out," Bryce muttered, under his breath; but he capitulated from blunt business method to confidential conference that tends always toward sympathy and pledge.

"All right. I'll tell the girl not to let anyone in," the young lawyer replied as he left the room.

Janis Gwin was a cat for quickness. At the turning of the door-knob the screen slid between her and the entrance to the private office, and the girl sat knitting idly on a summer sweater and staring idly at the outer door. But Bryce Carroday, who was somewhat quicker than a cat, saw the movement of the screen, and guessed its meaning.

"Don't let anyone in till I call you. I'm engaged," he directed.

"All right-y, if I happen to see 'em. I'm pretty busy on the side, sometimes," Janis drawled, looking up impudently.

Bryce stared back at her. Then, with only the edge of a smile in his eyes:

"You'll see them, all right-y. You haven't any side line."

"Yes I have, by golly! I tell fortunes. Madam Martingale, the Brainless Wonder," with a sweep of the head. "There's a blond woman who's in love with you, and a lot of it. You are goin' to take a journey. Beware of a small, dark man. He's hangin' around the elevator out there now. You'll meet your fate in about, say, five hours from now. Dollar, please," Janis Gwin rattled after Bryce as he left the room.

Out of the tail of his eye he caught sight of the screen moving swiftly back to give full command of the situation.

"I didn't tell any story. There was a little shrimp hanging round that elevator. Funny if he'd turn out to be something in this game. If he does, then I've got the ouija board buffaloed, that's all. I'm dead sure right on the blond lady," the girl commented, as she took up her knitting again.

Meantime Estelle Sidol read Jack's note quickly, then skillfully pinching off what she wanted of one

corner and tucking it safely into the pocket of her coat, she threw the paper into the empty waste basket. Bryce notice it as he entered, and smiled grimly, wondering what its writer would think when he came in, as he was likely to do at any minute, in spite of Mrs. Sidol's report to the contrary.

"What can I do for you?" the lawyer asked, seating himself with his back to the light so that his face was in the shadow.

"You are most matter-of-fact, Bryce. Have you forgotten—France?" Estelle Sidol asked, gently.

"O Lord! no, Mrs. Sidol. I wish I could forget everything except the kindness of the woman whose official influence kept me from coming home too soon and so saved my life. We never forget that sort of thing, and never adequately return thanks for it, because it can't be done."

"Oh, Bryce, Bryce! I didn't come here for thanks. I wish you would never speak of it again, truly I do. Men and women did the same thing every day—sometimes putting their own lives in pawn to do it. Forget that now."

"I won't do it; but go ahead, Mrs. Sidol," Bryce returned, appreciatively.

"May I review first? Then you will understand." Estelle Sidol's face was winsome, and the touch of sadness seemed to enhance its charm as she sat with downcast eyes and folded hands.

"Certainly. Take all the time you wish. I am

a free lance this afternoon, it seems," Bryce replied, courteously, adding under his breath, "She's a delicious sinner to look at, always, but she's got her lines committed, I'll wager."

"When I first knew you in France and you—seemed—interested in me a little bit, I wasn't Mrs. Sidol then, I was just Tellie Kilwarth," the woman began, in a low voice, lifting her eyes a moment.

In the shadow, Bryce Carroday's face was expressionless.

"In those delightful days in Paris I did not know of your interest in that Colorado girl, my niece by marriage now. How could I know, when you never spoke of her until in your delirium in the hospital? But now, tell me of her now."

"There's nothing to tell. She's married. That settles the case—out of court," Bryce Carroday answered, gravely.

"Always, with everybody, does it?" Estelle smiled frankly.

"I don't know about everybody. I know about myself, though," Bryce declared, bluntly. "Please go on with your review, Mrs. Sidol."

Estelle Sidol's cheek paled a trifle, but the downcast eyes veiled the fire of anger in them. She would win by soft words if possible, but she would win. Estelle Sidol played no losing game.

"General Sidol's first wife and he were not living together when I first knew him, although

they were never divorced. We were married three months after her death; somewhere down South that was," Estelle Sidol recited this glibly as if eager to be done with it. "Before her death the general went to Colorado to look after his mining interests, and there he met this girl friend of yours. He thought you were lost at sea and I think he was glad of it. He never knew my part in that till after we were married. Then he turned against me on your account."

In spite of Estelle's plea that Bryce Carroday forget her service to him, she could make the obligation to her press heavily when she chose.

"The general was perfectly infatuated with this Western girl, in spite of the difference in their ages," the woman continued. "He may have meant then to get a divorce from his legal wife, for he urged her to promise to marry him—now that you were supposed to be out of the way for all time. Pardon me, please, if I say that the girl must have been rather easily led, or maybe a little fickle, to forget a man like you so readily." (No man, not even Jack Lorton, would have dared to say this to Bryce Carroday so insinuatingly. But the law is against throttling innocent women.) "I knew of his wife's death and his freedom to marry again, a month before he did. A good friend of mine helped me to that information, but I never told him till I got ready. So it was really I who saved her from him, I who made the match

between her and his nephew, half owner of the Sidol mines, a really good fellow, impulsive, though, and headstrong; goes after what he wants with a rush, as you know. It was a good way to settle things, and I really think she is happy now. Don't you?"

"I am sure of it," Bryce replied. "But you knew, when you arranged this marriage, that I was living, and in France, did you not?"

It was not in Estelle Sidol's self-centered nature to understand the face before her now, nor to interpret the tone of voice in which the question was asked. Moreover, she was determined to win this man to her vassalage, partly because she had been blindly infatuated with him from their first meeting, and partly because he was the first man whose admiration she had ever sought and failed to win. So she smiled up at him now with all of a pretty woman's daring coquetry.

"Yes, I knew, and I knew the little girl had cared for you—but—she *thought* you were gone and she was reconciled. She couldn't have cared so very much, you see, and Bryce, Bryce, I truly didn't think of your caring for her. You never told me about her—except in your delirium—and I had learned to care for somebody, myself, then; somebody I could not give up; somebody I never can give up, never want to give up, because I care so much for him. I was glad she loved this nephew. I wanted her to be happy—and out of my way;

then I felt sure that when you had no obligations holding you to her you would come to me. I had done so much for you, and—and truly I thought it would be all right for all of us. Bryce, I did it because of you. You must know why."

The golden-crowned head drooped and the soft voice ceased as the dainty little creature sat so near, so tenderly sorrowful, before the big, strong man. To be harsh with such a beautiful woman was like crushing fragrant, thornless blossoms. Bryce wondered in that instant what Jack Lorton would do if it were his case here—Jack, who was a born lover. When he spoke again his voice was calm.

"And you thought later that I did care for her?"

"I thought you must, for you never came to find me, and I was foolishly angry, after all I had saved you from; and the general was furious at his nephew for getting in his way—he has a horrible temper—and started suit through your firm to ruin him. Just then the word of his wife's death came to him, incidentally through me, and (I didn't know him then as I do now) we were married. He seemed to turn to me at that time for comfort, for he had been crazy about that—rather unusual little Colorado girl."

"I see! What next?" Bryce questioned, dryly.

Even with that cold, level voice of his, the woman before him would not give up yet. She had held men by her charms under greater dif-

ficulties. The game was all the more alluring as it became more daring.

"That's all of the review, Bryce. You know I have at least not deceived you nor held back anything, not even my own deep and tender feeling and my loss. Now comes the present, which is always the main thing."

This with a sigh of satisfaction. Mrs. Sidol's past was never good to the taste; but she was always commander-in-chief of the present; and, as she took little thought for the morrow, the worst was over.

"Just a minute, Mrs. Sidol," Bryce interrupted, courteously. "Let me see if I have grasped all of the review. When I met you in France you were not a wife—that is, you were legally separated from Captain Kilwarth, the father of your children. General Sidol, then Colonel Sidol, was living away from, but was not divorced from, his wife. A little girl in Colorado was wearing a ring I had given her. The surgeon reported me fit and the colonel listed me for transportation in that ill-fated ship. You prevented me from going, and my relapse that so soon followed proved you to have been right in your judgment. Then came the shifting to a distant hospital, the long weeks of illness, the report of the loss of the transport on which I was listed, the delayed mails, my letters home, lost, like myself, somewhere for months. But in it all I was too stupid to think of your kindness as—

personal. I was not so presumptuous as to hold myself a subject of your personal interest. Then General Sidol went to Colorado and made love to my girl friend. You interfered and planned the match with the nephew, young Edward Sidol, knowing at the time that the general's real wife, Mrs. Sidol, was dead, but keeping it from her husband. It left two of us, the general and myself. You chose General Sidol when he was free, and you leave me to infer—pardon me, Mrs. Sidol—that you thought I was impossible. The general was angry and began suit with his nephew over property rights, and you two were married. Am I correct in this?"

"Perfectly. Now for the present." Mrs. Sidol took the matter calmly. "When the general found that I had planned to get your friend out of his reach, and that I had known that he was a free man before he did, he was furious with me and blamed me for everything. He was sure he could have married this girl if he had known earlier that he was free. He blamed me for saving your life and for interfering and pushing his nephew, Edward, into the matter; and he not only wants to destroy this nephew, but he is insanely jealous of you, on my account. So he begins suit for divorce with your New York firm. You know, of course, that Grace and Grace are handling the case. Bryce, if you do not get your firm in Colorado to drop this matter it will ruin his nephew and that wife of his

that you once knew and liked so well. Surely you do not want to help to do that. You are such a wonderful man to forgive and forget. Everybody must love you for it," Estelle said, sweetly. "But, Bryce Carroday, this mines case *must not only be dropped* for the sake of that girl friend of yours; *you must also stop the divorce suit here.*"

"Frankly, Mrs. Sidol, how can I? And why should I?" Bryce Carroday questioned.

"You do still care a little for that Colorado girl, now Mrs. Edward Sidol, even if she did forget you so soon?" The query was all pleadingly put.

"If I do she will never know it," Bryce declared, definitely.

"But you would not do her harm," Mrs. Sidol asserted.

"Not intentionally," was the reply.

"Professionally and intentionally are the same thing. *You will not let that nephew and his wife lose, as they must lose if you go on.*"

In his heart Bryce knew that she had spoken the truth. And, while his countenance did not change, his pulses quickened. How much had this woman before him guessed regarding this trip of his to New York? Did she surmise that he, the junior member of his firm in Denver, was holding back the proceedings, begging for time, following up what to the senior partners seemed unimportant leadings of evidence, the proofs of which might lose the firm its case and make Carroday appear to be

throwing the balance to the favor of the defendant whom he should be resisting?

"How can it affect *you* if they should lose, Mrs. Sidol? It will only increase your husband's finances?"

"If the general wins he will be so rich he can have whatever he wants. Money is stronger than Big Bertha guns, stronger than anything in the world—except a woman's love. It is partly jealousy of you, remember, that makes him seek this divorce, and when he gets it, as he will if he wins in the Denver suit, he will offer all he has to his nephew's wife, to leave her husband for him. You are already lost to her, but her husband will be jealous of you and let her go to the general the more readily. She can't be very strong willed, as you must know by this time, and she will be poor then. Money talks to most women as well as to most men."

"Good Lord! What a mess!" Bryce exclaimed to himself. Aloud he asked:

"What does that mean further?"

"It means that I'll be cut off with a pitiful alimony and will stand a woman scorned before the world. You may have needed me once. It is because I need you now that I have come to you." A pathetic pleading no words could picture was in the sad, sweet face, the soft voice.

"But isn't freedom the best thing for both of you now?" Bryce asked, frankly.

"A woman doesn't need freedom; she needs love. What more can I say?"

Again the pathos in the deep-blue eyes called for sympathy with a silent insistence no words could express. Bryce waited a moment before he replied:

"There is nothing more to be said. I am a lawyer, which to some minds means only a trickster, but I must do what seems to me to be just and right in all this business that concerns me as a member of my firm. If I can help you I'll do it to the limit. The limit is all that is fair and clean. I'd be eternally thankful for the opportunity to serve you as a friend may serve a friend, as one to whom I owe an unredeemable debt, but I cannot go farther than that now. I am not connected with your divorce suit. My firm has only to do with General Sidol's rights in Colorado. A man sent out from this office is doing the civil engineering for us—"

"Sent out from this office!" Estelle Sidol exclaimed, then caught her breath, and the rose hue on her cheek deepened.

"Isn't he?" Carroday inquired.

"Oh, I suppose he is," the woman replied, indifferently. "I don't know the business side of this matter. I mean the details, of course."

"She slipped on that. That fellow out at the mines *is a tool of hers.*" Bryce's eyes revealed nothing of this triumphant decision, however, and

Mrs. Sidol hoped that he had not grasped her meaning. She rose to her feet.

"Bryce Carroday," she said, gently, "I am not ashamed of my feeling for you, and I am glad you know it now; glad that you know that all of one woman's love can be yours for the taking, even if I know that you will not take it now. You may come to me some day. I can wait."

Bryce, who had also risen, made no comment.

The red lips tightened and the eyes had a strange look in them as Mrs. Sidol continued: "I ask you to use your power for this Colorado girl who will suffer most by that Denver lawsuit, while it gives to my husband an increase of wealth that I shall never be allowed to share. I ask you to use your power to stop the divorce case here, that I may not be disgraced and have my income, such as it is now, diminished—"

"Just one minute more, Mrs. Sidol. Does this affect your children at all?" Bryce asked, earnestly.

"Oh no! Their own father provided for them. By his will, which Jane Kilwarth, his maiden sister, his executrix, administers on his estate, all his property goes to his two children. I lost my alimony when I married General Sidol." Mrs. Sidol spoke with a glib indifference. "But may I ask you a question? Do you really care for, really love, any man or woman? Oh, Bryce!"

"What's she after now, I wonder? Haven't I shown her plainly enough that I'm a brute?"

Bryce asked himself. "Yes, I care for many, in a way," he answered her. "As a man, I know I love an old college chum of mine more than any other living man since I lost my father. He died of grief when he gave up all hope of my ever coming home again. He hung on for months, though. A slow, daily heartbreak. But that's all over now. I guess I have more good friends all along the trail than I deserve, maybe, but my old chum means most to me."

"You do have many friends who love and admire you even more than you care for them. But to all except this one man you put your profession first and your affections second, as you have put me to-day. But you would sacrifice everything to do what he asked of you."

"Oh, I hope I am not so stony-hearted as that, Mrs. Sidol, but I guess you are right about Jack Lorton. We walked the joyous highway of youth together, and together, for a long time, we faced the one grim enemy of man. Then we were separated, and later each thought the other was 'gone West' and something dropped out of the universe for each of us—"

"If this chum asked a boon of you, then you would grant it, though the heavens fell!"

It was not a question; it was a declaration. Mrs. Sidol gazed into the young lawyer's eyes with a look whose sorrowful meaning he read all too well. Followed then a slowly changing counte-

nance, from appeal to decision; and then, with just the touch of a soft hand on the man's broad palm, the beautiful woman passed swiftly out from Bryce Carroday's presence.

. . . . . .

He stood still and stared at the door through which she had vanished, and wondered if he had really wakened or if he still slept and waited for Jack Lorton's return.

"I say 'darn the wimmenfolks,' too. I hadn't thought of it before, but I suppose 'Little Colorado' must have been easily led, she forgot me so quickly. I wonder if I wouldn't have waited for her till doomsday. I don't know. There's Jack's girl. From what I can get out of him, she's some sort of a darn fool, too. Suspicious of him, it seems, since she came back, and with high and mighty notions of a woman's big job of running the world. And this creature is still another type, and utterly selfish. She doesn't care for me. She wants the money from those mines. That's behind this divorce fight. She saved my worthless life, of course, but if she had only sent the letters I gave her to mail at the hospital, instead of holding them back so long, as I am sure now that she did, my father might have lived to meet me in Denver. Oh, she's a devil, a born, beautiful devil! This room smells foul. I'll air it out for Jack."

As he crossed to the windows to open them, suddenly Mrs. Sidol's words came back to him, "If this chum asked a boon of you, you would grant it, though the heavens fell."

"She'll get Jack. She will! O God forbid! She must know him now, she got in here so easily. He's a tender-hearted cuss. His girl is breaking him all up. She'll step into the breach with that soft way of hers and get him root and branch before he knows it. She will come at him through need of help to win me over first. She will tangle him in a web he can't break. I know her. When that happens he won't listen to me if I warn him. There's where a man is powerless, with another man."

Bryce Carroday's face hardened with a grim determination.

"I hope from this hour that I can forget all the women that I ever knew—all except my mother—and never know another one. I do. You can fight fools and knaves and Huns and death. You can't fight women. But I'll never trust one again—so long as the rivers run, I will not."

Slowly and dramatically the right hand was lifted in solemn oath.

"Where is Jack's Bible? Over there between his Kipling and his Whittier, of course. Let it stay."

He dropped the hand to his side with a gesture of contempt at his ridiculous pose as he muttered:

"I do vow it here. I will never trust a woman again, so help me God!"

So Bryce Carroday determined, who was yet to meet and know Cid Jannison.

He glanced at the clock, thankful, for the moment, that Jack Lorton had not come in, and then left the room. On the descending elevator he caught sight of a face he ought to know.

"Just missed 'up.' Who was that fellow going down? Must have been the office girl's 'small dark man.' Good heavens! Why—it was—it was that civil engineer sent out to survey the Sidol boundary lines in Colorado! Her tool! He's here on business, now, just as I am. But what is it? It's my business to know his business. I had a feeling he'd bear watching. I know it now." . . .

Then came Janis Gwin into the private office.

"Well, there was a blow-out of somebody's tires, that's clear. Never one of 'em remembered I was assisting through the rooms, when they mogged out by me. I'll bet a potato it was gun ag'in' gun, and neither got sent West—yet. What's this?" The girl's bright eyes fell on the waste basket, empty but for the crumpled note. "Uh-huh! I had that basket emptied at noon. This here is the salvage of the recent terrible wreck. I'll call it a clew." She spread out the paper and read it carefully. "Mr. 'Big Sister's' note to Mr. 'Big Man' to wait for him. Well, why didn't he come back? What kept him afar? I

had the dictation for this. It's on my pad still. I'll see what's been chewed off here." The girl's writing pad was quickly brought out.

"Here it is. I see what's off now, and 'tain't by no accident, neither. It says:

"nothing
in N. Y. C. when you are
Wait for me, Beloved—
Your only—

JACK.

"Now who tore that off so carefully? It reads like somethin' else 'n what it was meant. Did that 'Big Man' want it for a souvenir of 'Big Sister's' autograph? Say, if J. F. Lorton couldn't shoot no better 'n he can write his name, I wonder they didn't 'scuse him from military duty on account of flat feet. Where is that scrap that's tore off got to?" A puzzled frown; then a flash of steely bright eyes. "That yeggwoman done that. *She's—after—'Big—Sister.'* He's got a girl he's crazy about, and they're scrappin' for nearly a month. I'm on to that. Told 'Peter Rabbit' all about it, Sunday. I'll just *keep* this crinkled thing. It's only a scrap o' paper, but it may come into use yet, when I write my real novel of real folks. No tellin'. Big novel that's goin' to be. If she thinks she can show up anything on J. Fairborough Lorton, she's got little Janis Gwin to exterminate first. And them kind of little bugs dies hard, they do. Golly!"

VI

THE PORTRAIT ON THE MANTEL

CID JANNISON had come by inheritance into possession of the entire building of which her own apartment formed the highest story. It had been much remodeled from time to time, but was not yet of the strictly new type that segregates the indweller with a bank-vault security from intrusion. The halls and stairways and elevators were all of a free-highway sort, where the passing to and fro soon made a neighborhood acquaintance. Moreover, the place had the unusual feature of admitting families with children and provided a common playground for them on the roof. So the patter of childish feet on the stairs and the sound of childish laughter in the halls gave a home touch to the surroundings. This opportunity for familiarity and for child life, however, necessitated a careful selection of tenants—there was always a long waiting list—to maintain an exclusive dignity. Cid saw to all that, personally controlling the business features, down to the least detail.

So the building in time took on an individuality peculiarly its own, as an exclusive, elegant, well-located dwelling place, difficult to get into, but delightfully homelike and neighborly once access to it was obtained.

Cid had other possessions in her own right and, with her cousin Jack, was joint heir to still other property in the yet undivided estate of the elder Lortons.

It was in relation to some immediate needs of their jointly owned property that Cid had called Jack on the afternoon of his appointment with Bryce Carroday. The matter was easily disposed of, and Jack's call would have ended quickly but for an incidental remark of Cid's. She was arranging some purple iris overflowing a big bowl on the mantel, and Jack, hat in hand, on the point of leaving, had just assured her that he would relieve her of the care of the property matter at once, when she said:

"Jack, I believe I'll put these flowers on the table for this evening and have the grate fire lighted. It will be cool to-night as it was last night, and the iris will be too warm on the mantel."

"Let me lift them off for you, Cid." Jack dropped his hat and took the heavy bowl from its place. As he turned to the table he looked over his shoulder at Cid, who was holding up a big, handsomely framed photograph.

"I'll put this up here for to-night for Mr.

Carroday's benefit. I just had it tinted. Perfectly done, too, it seems to me. See, Jack. It's Leslie in her uniform. Isn't she sweet? Look out, boy!"

The bowl of iris fell from Jack's hands across the arm of the davenport. There was a crash of ceramic ware, a great splash of water, a sprawling of blossoms on cushion, seat, and floor, as the young man, oblivious to what was happening, stood staring at the picture on the mantel.

Jack had not seen the real Leslie since the meeting in this room on the day of Mrs. Sidol's call, but her image had been before his eyes night and day. Every morning he rose determined to make his work so fine, that he could so love it, he would forget there had ever been a Leslie whom he had loved; who once in the far back days of his youth might have loved him. She was dead now, that Leslie, whose dark eyes had looked up so trustfully into his own out on Gray Cliff one Easter Sabbath in his senior year in college. She was buried, for him, in a nameless grave in France. If only the living Leslie were not so real and so near, just up at Cid Jannison's now, he could and would forget her. But every evening found him lonely, hungry, waiting, hoping for something that could not be. Kindly indifference may sometimes be the most real of deadening forces. In this easy, definite, settled situation there was nothing to be changed.

This afternoon Jack meant to tell Bryce Carroday the whole story, of which he had so far given only broken bits. And therewith he would pledge himself before Bryce to forget the girl of his early love, as he knew Bryce was forgetting his own loss in Colorado. Each had carried home from France scars of old wounds healed. Each carried now deep-hidden scars of as yet unhealed wounds; and only in the sacredest hours of their friend-to-friend conferences did they let anything of the pain be known to each other.

Jack had been strong to-day, self-persuaded that, once he had put it all before Bryce, he could begin to whistle at the world again and bravely face whatever came or didn't come. And here in the winking of an eye he had forgotten everything else in the world, Cid Jannison included, as he stood staring at the portrait on the mantel before him. To the young man there no war cartoon, no magazine-cover decoration, no idealized portrait, could equal this humanly sweet face with its peach-blow coloring, its brave smile, its dark eyes full of pathos—set all in the white trappings of the Red Cross regalia. It was a wonderful face for a stranger to see. Before its calm, sympathetic beauty Jack Lorton's last defense went down and his own face, as he turned away from his cousin, was grim with the struggle for self-control.

"It doesn't make any difference about the bowl,

Jack. It was an old, garish sort of crockery, anyhow, and not at all valuable." Cid was tiding back to normalcy, as only Cid could do.

As she spoke Jack suddenly discovered what he had done, and without a word turned and helped to gather up the flowers and broken bits of pottery.

When the blossoms were at last in another vase Jack dropped on the cushioned seat, saying:

"Come, sit down here a minute, Cid. I'm homesick."

Cid Jannison should have been a mother, but even as a cousin she understood Jack Lorton better than some mothers can understand their own sons. They sat silent for a while, studying the portrait of the fair face on the mantel.

"She looks like a Madonna there," Cid said, meditatively.

"Yes, a Madonna, painted on cardboard," Jack offered.

"What's the matter, Jack?" Cid asked, directly.

"Nothing," Jack replied, still looking at the Madonna face before him.

"I know that," Cid declared. "I mean the real matter, though. I'm an inquisitive old maid."

"You are the best woman God ever made and left here long enough for us to know your real worth." Jack beamed affectionately on his cousin.

"Well, yes, I'm all of that, so maybe I can help even you—if you ever need me," Cid rejoined.

"Need you! Good Lord! I always need you! The scholarly Fairborough blood made me a civil engineer; but for the Lorton side—Cid, I'm sometimes glad, and sometimes sorry, too, that I am a Lorton. They feel so deeply. You got your 'quietness and confidence' in which Job, or somebody else, says is one's strength, from the Jannison side." Jack looked at the portrait again. "She's got it, too.

"With the granite of 'The Leslies'
In her muscles and her brains.

I wish you'd take that down. No, leave it there. I don't care anything about it."

"You do," Cid insisted.

"I tell you I don't," Jack declared.

"Seriously, Jack, what is the matter?"

"Nothing, I tell you again." Jack smiled down genially now.

"Have you and Leslie quarreled?"

"No."

"Jack boy, you do care for her," Cid said, gently.

"I don't," Jack declared, definitely. "Not like you mean, I don't. I might have once, but that was antebellum foolishness. I've learned better. I was just surprised a minute ago at seeing this. I'd really almost forgotten Leslie ever was a Red Cross nurse. It took me back to days of awful battle, and I never go to France in my mind

if there's anywhere else to go. But it is a beautiful thing, that portrait. It is only a portrait to me, though."

In spite of Jack's earnestness, his cousin's gray eyes were full of sunshine as she said, gravely:

"John Fairborough Lorton, C.E., you are the biggest liar between here and the Goddess of Liberty, which is saying something for New York City. But I believe in you—not what you say, but *you*."

"Thank God! Cid, that's worth a million in any market. I am true to my best self, now. I don't care as you think I do. I am just a good friend of Leslie Jannison's—an old friend, an almost-related and always-to-be friend, by a long inheritance of friendship of three good families up the Connecticut. That's the end of that page. Turn over."

Jack was triumphing over himself magnificently now.

"She'll be here to-night, of course," he added, carelessly.

"No. She's invited out for dinner. That's why I dared to set her picture up there. I'm sure your friend will admire it, and maybe when they meet he will admire her. From what you say, they would suit each other splendidly," Cid declared, as if sure now of Jack's approval.

But Jack turned on her sternly.

"Since when did you become a matchmaker, Cid? I know Bryce and Leslie both too well. They would fit each other about like—" The gray eyes lost their sternness, the black brows straightened, and the harsh voice grew gentle. "Say, Cid Jannison, here's the situation. I couldn't tell even Bryce yet, but you're the one and only Cid. Once upon a time a cousin of yours thought he loved a girl. He had dreams of a future of professional success, dreams of a happy home. He was a fool dreamer, for he used to look down the years on a sunlit way, and vision this girl, a regulation blushing bride, a sweet-faced wife, a Madonna-browed mother. And—life was to be the typical old grand sweet song in the ancestral home of her childhood. I repeat, he was a fool dreamer. He is a fool still, but he's quit dreaming. Just when blissful boyhood days slipped into young manhood hell broke loose and turned clear upside down, with the words 'Made in Germany' on the bottom, as somebody has said. Then along with some hundreds of thousands of others this young dreaming fool went out to help to turn it back; or at least to raise it and put a chunk under for a little while. When the fires cooled and the burnt fingers healed a bit, there wasn't any dream stuff left. The girl was buried over in Flanders fields, and a woman, beautiful and sweet and very unselfish, but *not lovable*, came back in her stead. So these two, who once were young and foolishly

happy, now walk their separate ways. She is happy in her plan of laundering the submerged tenth; she's in the onrush of the better-homes-for-more-babies-for-the-poor movement; with no home, and nary a baby, for the rich. She's going to catch the millennium by the foretop and bridle it for social service. She's giving herself, grandly, nobly, in a general, wholesale way. She has divided her heart into ten million bits for ten million souls; and there's just the ten-millionth part of a heart's love in each bit. So she puts on clean pillowslips for little heads that ought to nestle on a mother's warm bosom. She is an institution, a system, a new order, not a girl—and— Oh, the devil!"

Jack paused a moment.

"Tell me the rest of it," Cid said, gently. "Go on to the end."

"And the man in the case?" Jack continued. "Oh, he doesn't count. It's his business to see that buildings are plumb and bridges don't sag. And he'll go on seeing to it for all that's in him. He'll do this much for the world—whatever he measures, by the eternal God of the universe! shall be true to the line. But, oh, Cid, at heart he's still just a common fool—a heart-hungry, foolish fool—and so he will always be, world without end, Amen."

There was no choking of the voice; there was no quiver of a feature; but the gray eyes looking

up at the portrait of the beautiful Red Cross nurse were full of tears.

"Jack, it is not easy to see ourselves always. Could it be that you have changed, too? That you are not the same boy—the young senior wearing all sorts of fraternity pins, and the gold key of the Phi Beta Kappa, who marched one June day in an academic procession, and the next day went out of college into a military training camp?" Cid put the question kindly.

"No boy who went to France came back the same boy if he wasn't feeble minded; and only a few of that class got by—among the privates. War with all its hate and fire and blood doesn't wash over you and leave you the clean little Fauntleroys. But there be some, of whom Bryce Carroday is a type, who took manhood into battle and came out unscathed of soul. For myself, I don't know. I guess I can still look the world in the face, and maybe my own face isn't too awful to look into."

It was a fine face, a clear, handsome face, with honest eyes and a firm mouth, that met Cid Jannison's gaze as she looked full at her cousin.

"Jack, you are all right, and the girl's all right, and the world's all right, and God's in His heaven. Keep on straightening crooked walls and jacking up sagging bridges. Keep your own life in straight lines, too, and don't let a sag get into your soul. There's a big lot of living to be done yet, by us

two, last-of-the-Lorton-family; we who are at the beginning, not at the end, of doing things. He who was once a dreamer will always be a dreamer. It's good for the world's health that he is. We'd get sordid and insipid and sick, and die at last of pernicious anæmia, if it were not for the young men who dream dreams. It's the very wine of life, the dreams, stimulating us toward the real somewhere."

The voice, sweet with emotion, the womanly presence, the calm assurance, the firm foundation of belief, brought their beneficent inspiration at a crucial moment. Jack Lorton drew a deep breath, as if a weight were lifted from his upholding.

"You're not an angel, Cid; you are a real, human, honest-to-God woman. And if I hadn't a single other blessing, I'd be rich, a million times a millionaire, because I've got you. Say, Cid, why did *you* never marry? There's no man good enough for you, but some of them are devilish tricky. I wonder how you escaped."

Cid Jannison's face was good to see as she smiled up at her big cousin.

"I should have been christened 'Cassandra,' or 'Sibyl,' or for some Bible prophetess, I can see your future so clearly. But the forbears named me 'Cinderella,' and the real prince never came. You can't take on royalty with a near prince, you know. So my toes are still in the cinders. There's a bit of tragedy in it, though, Jack. I can't tell

you now. Some day—'way hence—maybe I will, if you are still interested. It concerns only myself, though, and—I'll never marry."

Cid's eyes were full of tears now, as Jack clasped her hand.

"It's been a purifying for me, little cousin, this afternoon with you. God bless you. Let me tell you something. I'm going to leave New York. I am. Don't be shocked by this tragic disclosure. It isn't altogether a sudden resolve. I've really had it in mind ever since I got out of military service. I've been overseas; why not overlands, too? Not as a wanderluster, but as a soldier of peace, in service in my own line, of which right now 'I'm the cook and the captain bold,' and no general nor colonel nor lieutenant nor even a little 'shave-tail' can come storming at me with the command to do it his way, not now. So when I get that business upstate finished I'm going."

"And where?" Cid inquired.

"I haven't made up my itinerary or perfected any plans yet as to just where the next thing lies that I am foreordained to tackle. I want to study some engineering problems in bridge-building over some of our largest rivers. There's such a plenty to do everywhere, I shall not need to hunt long for employment. So many of us are nailed to our jobs and can only accept America on hearsay. It's a mighty big country, and, having the opportunity now, I'm going to try to work some of its

bigness into my own system, and work out of myself some of the littleness that sometimes makes a fellow a provincial and prejudiced puppy. Of course I'll come back sooner or later, for the real heart of me will always be here. I'm New England bred and New York broke. Your cousin Jack Lorton may burn all his bridges behind him, now, but I hope your distinguished relative, John Fairborough, is too much of a civil engineer to blow up the bridge sites too. And, being a C.E., he may reconstruct the way back if necessary, after a while."

"That isn't the entire reason for your going, Jack."

It was Cid's voice more than her words that made the young man look up with a frank smile.

"No, it isn't all just a study of America for its broadening effect that takes me so many thousand furlongs from the little Manhattan Isle. You can pick up the remnants of that bowl that I smashed in my awkwardness just now, and throw them out of sight on the ash heap. You can't dump your broken ideals, your lost hopes, out of your life by running away from 'the scene of the wreck.' I know that much still. But, Cid, I must be busy somewhere for a little while. Until I get to be less of a fool, I must go where I won't see, nor expect to see, Leslie Jannison. Do you remember that line in one of the last poems I sent you—'The West is the place where the dreams of the East come true'?

Maybe it will be the place where they are forgotten for me. I might go there and find out. But I'm forgetting my date with that beloved Bryce Carroday. He's sitting in my office now, sound asleep, no doubt, unless little 'Live Wire' down there contrived to give him a shock. She can do it, the little cat. We'll be here at seven."

"Shall I put the picture away, Jack?" Cid asked.

"Oh, leave it right there, set it on the dinner table, do whatever you want to. I'll stand all the tidal waves that sweep in, with you—you darling old trump. Where's Leslie going to-night, did you say?" Jack questioned.

"Just to dine with some overseas friends. It's an early dinner and she is going out somewhere afterward, not with them, though. I know these people only in a business way, but they know her, it seems, or, rather, friends of hers—hence the invitation, to get acquainted with one's friends' friends. Incidentally, I have new tenants in Seven. I took them through their business representative. They came on gilt-edged recommendations. Two children in the family, lovely and well trained, but sort of cowed down, it seemed to me. Children oughtn't to be cowed down any more than they should go unbridled. Trust an elderly maiden lady to know all about that, though," Cid declared.

"You are all of thirty, aren't you, Cid?" Jack had risen and picked up his hat to leave.

"Yes, thirty, and 'going on,'" Cid replied, laughingly.

"Oh, we are all 'going on' the next year," Jack rejoined. "What a lot of 'Never ripes' we'd be if we stopped somewhere. Bryce is thirty, also. I'm twenty-eight, myself, and jumping toward sixty fast."

Involuntarily the cousins both turned toward the mantel where Leslie Jannison's eyes seemed looking straight at them.

"She's been 'going on' so fast we'll never catch up with her, will we, Cid?" Jack said, meditatively.

"Oh, I don't know about that yet. We will see. She may start coming back, some day, and she's still a few years behind us, you know," Cid said, quietly.

"Good-by, you siren, luring me on the rocks of delay all this afternoon. I'll send you a vase for that one I busted. One I brought from France as a souvenir. It's as ugly as sin. I've always hated it. It will just suit you. I'm going sure now. If we don't get back for dinner to-night it will be because Bryce will have died of old age waiting for me. And if you don't like him when you come to know him, you are no lady, Cindereller Jannison. Good-by."

Jack playfully squeezed his cousin's arm and with a bow of mock dignity hurried away.

Cid Jannison was not surprised, late that afternoon, when she received a brilliantly colored

Parisian vase of quaint design, with the compliments of John Fairborough Lorton.

It was yet two hours until dinner. Cid wondered what was keeping Leslie, as she sat studying the portrait on the mantel.

"It's a mess of a world, sometimes," she said to herself. "A thoroughly rotten world. We do need the uplifters to make real the dreamer's dreams. Everybody fits in somewhere in the universe, if only we let the pieces be put together by the great Designer of the universe. Then it's not a mess; it's a mosaic. Oh! 'They also serve who only stand and wait,' and maybe get flat feet and bald heads in the service. I'd like to knock that word, 'service,' out of the human vocabulary sometimes, but it would knock the universe to flinders if I did. Well, here you are, Miss Leslie. Come rest you here with me."

This last to Leslie Jannison, who had just come into the living room.

"Where did you dig that up?" Leslie asked, as she sat down beside Cid and caught sight of her own portrait on the mantel.

"I have treasured it a long time, but I just had it tinted. Isn't it fine?" Cid answered.

"Calcimined, you mean. I haven't that much red and white stuff on my face," Leslie insisted.

"Oh, go look in the mirror," Cid urged.

"I don't want to. I am done with mirrors. They tell a sad, sad tale," Leslie said, lightly.

"But that was a stunning make-up I fixed for that photograph."

"Leslie Jannison, you need to look in the mirror till you see your own true self, dearie. You know that's a splendid likeness of you, and you know that you are more than half in earnest when you say you are done with mirrors. For goodness' sake, tell me why." Cid spoke earnestly now.

"For goodness' sake," Leslie repeated. "It is for just that that I am trying to lay aside some of the little vanities. No, don't interrupt me. I'm not going in for dress reform. It's all here now, anyhow—what the reformers prayed for for years —and we are just as much criticized by the men friends over dress as ever. We wear spectacles and short hair and short skirts and divided skirts and all that. And some preachers in the pulpits, who agonized over the dragging skirts and chignons and tight lacing, now consign us to Satan's own kingdom on account of wicked bobbed locks, and villainously comfy short skirts, and immorally loose big-waisted gowns. But seriously, Cid, I'm not playing prude nor reformer, as your eyes say I am; I'm hoping to accomplish a bit somewhere between sunrise and sunset. Truly the safety of the future for civilized strength lies in America, the big melting pot that is not going to Anglicize all nationalities here, but *Americanize*, with a new race, born of the best of all nationalities here. It is our one hope. One need not forget the little

things nor the lovely things of life to hold this bigger vision. Can't a girl grow into a woman sometime? There may have been some cheap sorts in the war service, no doubt, but no girl who wore that trapping up there"—Leslie pointed to her portrait—"and did the work it stood for, in France, ever stayed a care-free girl. For her, life put on new and tremendous phases."

"Not many girls who didn't know anything about that stay care-free. We all grow into women meeting new and tremendous phases, but we don't need to be so everlastingly serious about it. There's a lot of sunshine after thirty, my dear, a whole lot. The shadows don't really begin to lengthen till we quit looking into our mirrors and start looking for yard sticks to measure these shadows with. Really, Leslie, the fires of war are burned out now. Let's trim and light the lamps of peace. You and Jack are just alike about this thing, I see."

"Alike? Whatever has Jack to do here?" Leslie questioned, with a searching look in her beautiful eyes.

"In a way, alike, yes. You are taking hold of things differently, and thinking all the time of the *difference*, and not of the *things*. Say, Leslie, may I ask you a question?" Cid put this in her own straightforward way.

"Always, Ciddie," Leslie responded, but this time she did not look up.

"It is because I love you so, little cousin, that I want to know if you care one little bit for my big cousin, John Fairborough," Cid declared.

Leslie turned a clear face toward her questioner.

"Yes," she said, calmly. "I care a great deal for him. Not as I used to, because—we have both changed so. Our ways that ran close together once tend wide apart from each other now. Is there anything remarkable in that?"

"Could it be that only one path turned from the other, that the angle of their divergence is acute, not obtuse?" Cid asked, gently.

Leslie rose from her seat and stood looking down at her cousin.

"I wasn't good in geometry, Cid. I ran to languages, literature, poetry, romance, and drama. It was Jack who took to mathematics. But if it be as you say, that one has turned from the line, and one is going straight on in the old way, it is not I who have diverged, though I hope I have grown more unselfish. Some day you will agree with me, Cid. There's a lot of suffering in this world that comes from the yoking up of unequal ideals. It can't be done. First of all, a man's life must be clean and sweet, if all is to be well. And there mustn't be any doubt, any uncertainty, about it. You belong to both of us or I wouldn't say this. To-morrow we go up home to testify

in that automobile accident case. After that I want to go away somewhere—for a while, anyhow. Oh, Cid!"

It was characteristic of each that Jack should have freely confided in Cid, holding back nothing of his hopes and plans; while Leslie said only, "after that I want to go away somewhere—for a while, anyhow."

There were no Red Cross trappings about the girl's auburn hair that rippled back from her forehead, yet the sweet face, with its peach-blow coloring, the brave smile, and the dark eyes full of pathos, was very much like the picture on the mantel behind her. But across the living picture ran the line of an unbreakable will, the sturdy, self-determining power that does not change its course, though the heavens fall.

Leslie stood a moment, then stooped and kissed Cid Jannison's forehead.

"I'm going to dress for dinner now. I needn't look too long into the mirror to-night. The man host is out of the city. It is only the hostess whom I shall meet. I have another engagement at eight for the remainder of the evening. I won't be home till late, maybe. All my friends here in New York are too good to me," she said, and left the room.

Cid sat still, looking again at the portrait, and a smile, Cid's own sweet, triumphant smile, curved her lips.

"So runs my little world to-day. Jack Lorton, a dreamer, who majored in mathematics in college and holds to right angles, while all the time his eyes see visions. Leslie Jannison, most matter-of-fact, who has put girlhood and its sweet romances away for the stern service of womanhood, in *her* college days rejoiced in the study of languages and literature. And each is sure that it is the other who has gone far from the old path, and neither cares for the other — truly, frankly, honestly doesn't care any more. And Jack's gray eyes are full of tears, manly tears. I love him for that. And Leslie's big brown eyes are undimmed, though her heart is breaking, her sweet, loving heart. And Jack's going away. And Leslie wants to go, too. They might meet up yet at the other end of the trail 'where the dreams of the East come true.' They are both my cousins. I can criticize them if I want to. They are both spoiled a little bit. And because Leslie thinks, for some reason, that Jack isn't true to her, and she does love him so, she is affecting a coldness and lack of sympathy to hide her hurt. And because he thinks she *is* what she *seems*, and cares only for doing welfare work in a perfunctory way, and doesn't care for the stuff his dreams are made of, and because, down in his heart, he is still an old-fashioned Puritan about women in public life, he is stubbornly denying that he cares for her. That's the truth about them. But I can't tell them so

they will believe it. . . . If it wasn't for that Bryce Carroday taking up time here now, I might help both a little. But he *is* here. Oh dear! I know I can never like that man. He's so in my way."

VII

MEETING AMERICA'S BEST

CID JANNISON was never more charming, and her rooms were never more homelike than on the evening of her dinner for her cousin's friend, Bryce Carroday. The hostess herself, however, had rarely awaited the coming of a stranger with as little real interest as she felt in the guest of honor to-night. To the young lawyer, also, the function in anticipation became an obligation to be assumed with fortitude. The cause of all this lay in the fact that each was too unselfishly solicitous for the welfare of somebody else just now to hope to enjoy an evening of mere social pleasure. Because of this condition and this burdensome obligation to-night both entertainer and entertained felt that nothing must be left undone for the other.

> "We have careful thoughts for the stranger,
> And a smile for the sometime guest,"

Cid said to herself as she dressed for this dinner. "If it were only some dear old friend I'd enjoy being a regular cat to-night, I'm so wrought up.

But here comes a stranger whom I am entertaining only because he is Jack's friend, and I must outdo myself and pretend to be what I am not. I wonder how many strangers I ever entertained here for that boy, bless him! and been happy in doing it, too. But I have a feeling clear to my toes and back that I shall not care for this Bryce fellow, Jack's 'best beloved.' I wonder why Jack calls him that and what he calls Jack. 'Angel Child,' maybe. I fancy he's of the dreamy, poetic type, that plays old Jack on the soft pedal. I suppose I should have known him years ago if I hadn't been abroad, and if papa hadn't died while Jack was in college. He's a Western man, too, and I never did care for Western men. . . . I can't remember when I ever felt so unhappy and unstrung as I do to-night. Mercy, goodness! I've troubles enough on my hands now. I must dismiss or despise this Bryce Carroday of 'beloved' friendship. Such a red-blooded, manly term! Good old Cid, brace up and look your sweetest, or you will surely disgrace yourself as a hostess!"

Cid's "sweetest" was worth seeing. The determination to forget the problem of Leslie and Jack for a little while, the wish to please her cousin and make his friend feel sure of a welcome, together with an inherently hospitable spirit, made the hostess a magnetic presence in her beautiful rooms. And they were beautiful, with the soft

lights, the charm of the grate fire and blossoming iris, the cozy elegance of the dinner appointments for three (Cid wished for many reasons that it might have been four), and, pervading all, the genial spirit of hospitality, for the evening's guest.

. . . . . .

Meantime Bryce Carroday put on his dinner clothes with a slow hand.

"I wonder how long we will go on aping society ways with lying faces," he said to himself. "Instead of going out to meet a woman I don't know to-night, I'd rather sit here and swear my head off at a few I know too blamed well. Life might be a success without them, sometimes. It can't be much of a parade with the types I've met up with oftenest. I don't want to be a woman-hater (plague on that cuff link!), but who could help it with what I've seen? I don't believe I ever did dress for a function I cared as little for. (This tie looks like the devil.) The only genuine thing I've seen yet in New York City is that old horse thief of a Jack Lorton—yes," meditatively—"yes, and maybe that office girl he calls 'Live Wire.' I'd pretty nearly bank on her any day, the saucy, inquisitive little beastie! But she struck me as being sort of real, too, in a way. If the general's wife tries to work any game with Jack—and I am dead sure we are a long way from being

rid of Sister Sidol yet—that girl would be about the strongest card in his deck to outplay her, or I am no reader of faces. I'll keep an eye on her. I wonder if she knew that I heard all that rigmarole she fired after me as I left the room. 'Madam Martingale, the Brainless Wonder.' She said I'd meet my fate in about five hours. It was four then. I'll hang tight to Jack. If I should meet up with the general's wife about nine P.M. on the way back here, I'm afraid I'd murder her. Humph! Fine spirit this for a society dinner. Fine impression I'll make on that wonderful cousin lady of Jack's. Why should I care, anyhow? I'll get me off at once, but—I won't forget my vow. *I never will trust a woman again.* I'll stick to the law the rest of my earthly sojourn. There's that wire from Denver to-day. I must answer it yet to-night. They want me to hurry. Well, I want to hurry. If it weren't for Jack I could not get out of New York too soon. I must look up 'the small dark man,' the eel; then I'm gone. And here's this dinner coming on like the headache. Oh, blame the rotten luck! How I'd love to go into a real home to-night, the lost blessing of my childhood. We can make handsomer houses to live in, and life is cleaner and more comfortable, maybe, than it used to be, but, O Lord! is there any substitute for the old-fashioned, genuine sweetness of home love under a rooftree? Well—here goes."

Hot, nervous, unhappy, the big man of in-

herently cool temperament rushed away toward the Jannison apartment overlooking Central Park.

Cid had added the last touches to everything and then seated herself to await the coming of her guests. They were both late, and in the twilight hour the cares of the day slipped away.

The lamps were not yet lighted and the room was full of soft gray shadows, illumined faintly by the grate fire's glow on the one side, and by the afterglow of sunset through the western windows on the other. In this setting a graceful woman with a face of wonderful serenity rose up to meet Bryce Carroday; and something beneficent came to him with the smile of greeting and the welcoming handclasp.

"I am delighted to meet you, Mr. Carroday. My cousin is a little late, so we will omit the formalities. Take this chair."

Cid's words were simple enough. It was the personality of the woman back of the words that made its appeal, with the atmosphere of the place, the feeling at once that no tax would be levied on the guest, but, with "a world of strife shut out," all was freedom, sincerity, serenity within.

The guest unconsciously breathed deeply, and the legal perplexities of the lawsuit in hand, the sinuous outreaching of Mrs. Sidol, the nagging sense of disappointment and defeat in personal hopes and plans—all fell away, leaving Bryce

Carroday instantly at his best in the gracious presence of the woman he had dreaded to meet ten minutes ago. By some quick transference the entertained became the entertainer, and in the half hour before Jack Lorton's arrival there was not a dull moment. Each was utterly unlike the picture the other had formed, and the surprise of it was stimulating.

"I wonder what is keeping Jack. He promised to be here promptly to introduce you," Cid said, as the dinner hour arrived. "He must have disappointed you this afternoon, too. It was not I who kept him. Please don't blame me for that."

"Oh, I know Jack too well to do that! The old horse thief never did know the value of anybody's time. Excuse me, Miss Jannison, for calling him that. It was my old college name for him. He was such a corking-good, lovable fellow always. You know a freshman hasn't really matriculated in college until he gets a nickname. Jack, who didn't care a whoop what he was called, escaped until a professor whom he especially disliked, and whose weakness was in calling us all by our initial letters and never getting them right, insisted on calling him 'H. T.' Jack supplied the rest himself."

"And your name?" Cid inquired, remembering Jack's term of endearment.

"The most effeminate term a big Western boy like myself could have had—'Beloved.' I never did know how it got started in the dormitory my first

year, but it stuck to me from the first week in school till Commencement Day. May I ask you whose portrait that is on the mantel?"

The lamps were lighted now. A tall candelabrum on either side of Leslie's photograph shed a soft gleam down on the fair face.

Cid looked keenly at her guest before she answered. He was big and strong, direct of speech, well bred, easy to meet on any ground. And in spite of the apparent incongruity of the term, Jack's name for him seemed to fit him, somehow. At least he had not called Jack "Angel Child." As she hesitated, Bryce turned toward her inquiringly.

"That's my cousin, Leslie Jannison, taken in France while she was in the Red Cross service. It is a very good likeness of her, too, but it doesn't flatter her any and it isn't a bit overcolored. I am sorry she isn't here to meet you to-night."

As she spoke Cid recalled what Jack had said about Bryce and Leslie being unsuited to each other. She wondered if he could have been right in his judgment.

"It's a big admission when a handsome woman says that of a handsomer one. I guess Jack's Cid is all he claims for her," Bryce thought, as he rose to study the portrait.

"I've heard of her," he said, briefly, as he turned to his hostess, and their eyes met.

Cid was not sure what lay back of the words,

and the eyes puzzled her, but something seemed to lift from her heart in that moment. A sense of comradeship, the reliance on a new strength, the sharing of a burden, the assurance of the ultimate outcome—all swept in with that look in Bryce Carroday's eyes.

Just then Jack Lorton's cheery voice broke in upon the two:

"We have with us this evening— Pardon delay, Lady Cid. Your old elevator died just at the unpsychological moment and I waited with untheological language for the thing to work again; for I had no sociological disposition nor meteorological acquisition to ascend nine flights of stairs on my own two Mercury-winged heels. Why don't you move into a modern flat and rent this to athletes or immigrants?" Jack rattled on as he greeted the two warmly.

"I'm just in time to introduce you two strangers, I see. Permit me." With mock dignity the young man began a formal introduction. Then his eyes caught Leslie's eyes looking at him from her portrait. One swift glance at Cid, and Jack made a curtsy toward the mantel.

"Our honored cousin! How do you do, Miss Leslie! Glad you aren't here this evening. You are so much handsomer than your picture, neither Attorney Carroday nor any other legal light of Denver, Colorado, could withstand you."

Again Bryce looked at Cid, and this time each

understood the other. The dinner that followed with Cid and Jack seemed to Bryce Carroday the happiest hour he had known since the far-away days when life had no bigger perplexity than the question of beating some college fraternity out of a desirable pledge; or of deciding which "Little Colorado" would like best—pansies and sweet peas, or pink roses; or of how to stretch a pocket-book to meet the demands till the next check came from home.

Between those joyous days and now life had swept on in tremendous surges. And in and out through the deeper tragedy of it ran the minor chords of grief and disappointment; the long-delayed letters from the French hospital; the loving old father dying of slow heartbreak (Bryce's mother had died the year before he entered college); the loss of a young man's first love; the sense of distrust with the loss, and the struggle to forget; the gradual awakening to the infatuation and possible intent of a scheming woman; the legal perplexities of his profession; the genuine concern for his most loved friend—the "old horse thief" of joyous memories—these, with all the pages of military service, blackened with human blood and bleared with the anguish of bodily suffering and the grievous loss of brave-faced comrades.

To-night Bryce realized for the first time how little of real joy had been his as the days of his

young manhood went thundering by. When he came to New York City he had fancied himself not happy, but resigned, contented with his lot, ambitious, sure of himself, and unafraid of the world. To-night, just beyond the outer door lay strife. The one tremendous strength of this place within seemed its absolute security.

"I know now," Bryce thought to himself, "how the first cave man felt when he brought home his kill and rolled a big stone across the hole through which he had come in. Those inside might tear and claw the meat among themselves, but no bear nor wolf nor tribal enemy could trouble them there; nothing could enter save the little things that crawl through the crevices and scratch and sting. But what did the hairy-hided cuss care for stings and scratches?"

They lingered long over the meal, every minute revealing to the guest the real sources of Jack Lorton's magnetic hold on him. It was in the Lorton blood, type of our finest Americanism, best understood through this adorable cousin of Jack's.

They had left the table and settled for the evening around the grate fire when Cid's serving man entered.

"What is it, Ellis?" Cid inquired.

"Message for Mr. Jack," the man announced.

Jack left the room to receive it. He was back in a minute, the same jolly cousin, half guest, half host.

"Cid, I'm heartbroken, but I have an important call. It isn't far away, just over at the hotel, I suppose. I didn't ask Ellis, and I am sure I can be back soon. Take care of this infant till I get in. He will entertain you, though, better without me, anyhow. You'll both excuse me, I know."

Jack's tone was light, but something in his eyes as he looked at Cid seemed to belie his untroubled manner.

"There's always a big void when Jack goes out. You may not understand just what it means to me, for he is the last living Lorton cousin," Cid said, half jokingly, but affectionately, as the two sat down to await Jack's return.

"I do understand," Bryce replied. "He went out of my life once. I know all about the void of it. I lived months on months with that void. It never seemed to grow less. But since I've found him again the Fates play the cards against us. No sooner do we plan a meeting than something interferes. I beg your pardon, but you assured me that it wasn't your fault this afternoon, or I wouldn't say that, wouldn't call you a 'something.'"

"Not guilty, I assure you again. It was all over a girl, 'the other woman,'" Cid declared, "but really I do appreciate your feeling of annoyance. None of us have a century to live, anyhow, and these little foxes spoil things."

Cid touched the bell.

"Ellis, where was Jack going? To what hotel, I mean?" she inquired, as the serving man entered.

"It wasn't to a hotel, at all, Miss Cid. It was a call from the new people here, two floors below, in Number Seven. He said he'd be right back, ma'am, but it was a very urgent call, ma'am."

"I hope I'm not a fussy maiden-lady relative, Mr. Carroday, but, as I said just now, Jack is my only Lorton cousin left me." Cid paused.

Bryce, who had been looking up at Leslie's picture during the servant's stay in the room, turned now to his hostess.

"Miss Jannison," he said, earnestly, "there is no other living human being who means quite so much to me as your cousin, Jack Lorton. His success or failure, his happiness or sorrow, for his sake, are mine. I am sure that you, of his own flesh and blood, know the splendid manhood that is his much better than I do. Even his mistakes, and he is human, not a superman—his very blunders are unselfish. If there is anything that I can do to help you in your perplexity regarding him, please, please let me have the privilege of doing it."

Bryce rose as he spoke and stood before Cid Jannison—the guest she had so recently cared nothing about meeting—stood, a gentleman, a friend, a tower of strength in her need. She rose also and, extending her hand, said, earnestly:

"Mr. Carroday, I thank you more than I can say. Maybe together we shall be given the opportunity to do for Jack what he would do for each of us if it were possible."

They gripped hands cordially, and if Cid's cool palm brought an electric thrill to the palm it touched, it was only the mark of a mutual interest. Bryce was sure of that, very sure.

"We needn't stand," Cid said, with a smile. "'They also serve who only "sit" and wait' for John Fairborough Lorton. I found that out back in the prehistoric days when 'he was a tadpole and I was a fish.' You are right, he's no superman. He has a real lot of Lorton faults. He's quick tempered, in and out, on and off, as you know, and an idealist, and more than a trifle stubborn when he wants to be; socially as well as professionally he is specific, not generic. He doesn't think so much of the commanding appearance of a structure. He wants to know the elevation measurements and the exact floor levels. He looks at society the same way. And sometimes, Mr. Carroday, I think the war spoiled him in a way—made him satisfied with himself, that he is in the right; that it is the other fellow who is in the wrong."

"Jack?" Bryce Carroday broke in.

"Well, I'm related by blood ties. Maybe I can see more than even the dearest friend," Cid assured him.

"Are these Lorton family failings? I don't believe it," Bryce insisted.

"The Fairborough failings are of a different brand," Cid said, quietly. "Jack is wonderful in business matters. The last of the elder Lortons passed away after the boy was reported killed, and the estate was left undivided in the hope that he might yet be found alive and come back to help me with it. It isn't to be divided till one of us marries, which seems unlikely right now. For the sake of business cares I could wish it might never be divided. That care is all taken off my shoulders now. Oh, after all's said, old Jack *is* all right. He's sweet clear through, a Puritan for virtue and valor, a high-minded, gentle-handed, loving-hearted boy. But he'll hide his wounds till the Day of Judgment unless you take hold of him right. You know that."

"Yes, Jack is all you say, and it isn't all Fairborough, this list of virtues, either. And it is no easy matter to manage him ever, as I learned long ago," Bryce agreed. "What hotel is near here, did your man say? I hope he will come in soon. I'm sure he will, though."

"He isn't gone to any hotel. It's a call in this building—two floors down. Why, Bryce Carroday!" Cid exclaimed, staring at the young man.

"Well?" Bryce inquired.

"Excuse me, please, Mr. Carroday," Cid said, quickly.

"Sounds good to me. Thank you for calling me 'Bryce' once, anyhow. But you want to say something," Bryce declared.

"It is to my new tenants, down in Number Seven. They are friends of some friends Leslie met in France. She's invited there for dinner to-night to get better acquainted. I am glad to know more of them. I'm awfully strict about these apartments and never let one of them go before with a doubt in the lease. I have had a sort of feeling that something, I don't know what, isn't all right. But the agent who brought these people to me and did all the business transacting, a little, dark man, was fair spoken and convincing, and he had fine recommendations for them. This dinner of Leslie's helped to clear up matters in my mind a bit. The husband is out of the city to-night. Leslie is just the wife's guest. But I don't see where Jack comes in. That's the puzzle in the picture, find Jack's place. And Ellis says it's very urgent."

The clock struck the half hour.

"Leslie was to leave for another function at eight. This dinner was at six sharp. It's half past eight now. She can't have been connected with this call for Jack. What does it mean? You are a lawyer. Can you handle this case? I'm sure I am scenting trouble all over a foolish woman's intuition. Anybody can find trouble that way."

"Probably there is some one in Number Seven not connected with your cousin, or her host and hostess, who wants to see Jack a minute. It was expressly a short call; Miss Jannison and her friends are easily in some other social eddy by this time," Bryce offered.

"Oh, the lady wasn't going out with Leslie to the evening affair," Cid began. "She's alone down in Number Seven right now, I'm sure. General Sidol, her husband, is out of the city for a day or two, as I said just now—"

Bryce Carroday leaped up.

"General Sidol! Do they live in your house? Was Miss Leslie, your cousin, Mrs. Sidol's guest to-night? Was it Mrs. Sidol who called Jack?"

Cid stared at her guest with an anxious face a moment before her habitual self-control returned.

"Yes," she answered, in a low voice. "The Sidols are my new tenants. As I said, Mrs. Sidol has friends who knew Leslie in France. So she was invited there to-night for dinner. The general went to Philadelphia, I think it was, this morning. He will not be back till to-morrow. Leslie was to leave before eight for another engagement. What do you make of it?"

Bryce Carroday sat down and turned a lawyer's calm face toward Cid Jannison. When he spoke his voice was reassuring.

"Miss Jannison, you have asked for my opinion.

First, we must not forget that we may have started a string of surmises that may be misleading and amount to nothing. The janitor may have forgotten the combination on something on the seventh floor, and, knowing Jack, as evidently everybody does here, sends up an S O S call. In that case he will come in, head on full of steam, in a few minutes. Your charming cousin, Miss Leslie, is not under this roof and has nothing to do with this incident. Frankly, Miss Jannison, if you were like—most women I know, I would let it go at that. I can't do it with you."

Bryce Carroday paused, playing for a minute of time, and looked thoughtfully at the bowl of blue iris on the table.

"I love those flowers," he said, indifferently. Then with more interest he asked: "May I inquire where you got that quaint vase? I never saw but one like it before. That was in Paris."

"Jack brought that one from Paris," Cid said, explaining the events of the afternoon, not omitting the sudden sight of Leslie's picture as the cause of the broken bowl, and ending by quoting Jack's words about hating this vase, that to him it was as ugly as sin.

"Did Jack say that? Good for the old piker I said just now, I can't dismiss matters with you, as I believe I should with any other woman—unless"—with a smile—"unless it might be that slangy, saucy little red-headed girl down in Jack's

office. I'd hate to try to fool her by an inch. I'm not classing you two together, though."

"Oh, I know Janis Gwin. She's all right in her line. I've seen higher grades that I trusted less," Cid assured him.

"Well, then," Bryce continued, "I don't know, of course, just the situation as to Jack and your cousin. I know he cared all that was in him for this girl once. I know he is unhappy now—and proud, and disappointed over something. I cannot venture a guess, of course, regarding her feelings in this matter. But just here comes in this Mrs. Sidol—you've seen her, of course, but you'll never guess the depth of her shrewdness, nor her selfishness, nor her *intensity*, I suppose you call it. She knows men only as lovers; women as rivals. Life to her is a game of luxury, adulation, sentimental affiliations, jealousies."

"And I have her signed-up lease. How stupid I am," Cid interrupted.

"She'd make the Angel Gabriel sign up for a whole suite in the House of Many Mansions if she were going that way. She isn't. She's far down another highway, with all of her wonderful sweetness and all that. I know her and I believe she wants to get a grip on Jack. There's a purpose, a devilish, selfish purpose in it. She took this apartment for that purpose. She's called him down there to-night. Lord knows how she ever got acquainted with him, or what excuse she'll

put up for doing it. Of course, Miss Leslie has gone before this time. But it means trouble, with unforeseen entanglements. I can watch one side for you. I must leave Jack and this cousin of yours to you. Can't we work together for the sake of the boy we both love, and for that sweet-faced girl up there, who must be lovable, since both you and Jack seem to adore her? Understand, I'm no matchmaker. I *hate* that business. That's Mrs. Sidol's strong suit." Bryce spoke bitterly, the memory of the afternoon and its revelations of Mrs. Sidol's contriving overcoming him. The young man paused a moment, then added:

"If these young people can't agree, they disagree. That's their business. But it's my business to checkmate a designing woman who can slide in just at the psychological moment and ruin a man's hopes forever, and then toss him into the discard. It shall not be done."

Cid Jannison's eyes were on the speaker's face throughout this speech. When he had finished she leaned forward, saying earnestly:

"Mr. Carroday, I do know the family side of this. Jack and Leslie each talked with me to-day. What the outcome will be I do not even hazard a guess. It is not only a matter now of saving them from somebody else, as you suggest, it is also to save them from their own misunderstood selves. Whether their two ways shall become one is their own business, not mine or yours. But yet they

are my hero and heroine. All the romance of my life is in these two. Yes, we can work together. We must."

Bryce did not look up as Cid spoke. Something in the voice, the woman, the theme, the home-setting of this wonderful evening, was overpowering. It was a new atmosphere, a new outlook, a new womanhood, that held the young lawyer in their spell.

"To-morrow Jack and Leslie are called up north to testify in a damage suit over an automobile accident. It may drag along too late for Jack to get the New York flyer to the city in the evening. He ought to go on to Leslie's home for the night. I have a notion that if the two would go up on old Gray Cliff for a Sabbath afternoon together they might come to an understanding. It is sweet up there. But there's no telling what will happen. Mr. Carroday, why can't we go to that trial, too? And all of us go out to the old homestead for the night and Sunday? You would love it up there, I'm sure. It's a real home, not an apartment, and the Connecticut Valley is beautiful at any time of the year to me. Of course, it's not like your Rocky Mountain country. These New England hills woo you. They reach out loving arms and cuddle you in their soft green folds. Your mountains stand up so huge and unconquerable. They defy you. They shout, 'I dare you to climb my cliffs!' "

"I'll go—glad to go. Sure it's the very thing for us to do. And I'd love to see the place. Jack has pictured it to me a hundred times—the last time when we were in a slimy hut in France, with the guns belching fire over our heads." Bryce rose as he spoke. "That's our first move, together, in this game."

"Do you believe Jack will come back soon?" Cid asked, rising.

"I am sure he will not. Knowing where he has gone I know he will not, Miss Jannison. And I must go now, too," Bryce replied.

All the work of the morrow must be crowded into the hours of this night to make the trip up the Connecticut possible for him.

"We seem very inhospitable, Mr. Carroday. Jack was late in coming and early in leaving, and you get no consideration at all in the matter," Cid declared.

"I'm concerned only for the cause of his leaving. Otherwise, believe me, Miss Jannison, this has been the best hour I have known in many a long day."

The declaration was too sincere to be doubted, but to Cid the cause of it all lay in their common interest in Jack Lorton. He who was always the hero of her life, as Leslie was her heroine. She had put away romance for herself a long decade ago. It did not occur to her that she herself might

have been the maker of Bryce Carroday's best hour.

The young lawyer sat in his unlighted room till far into the night, staring down at the shifting glitter and glow of the night streets of New York City.

"I've been dubbed practical and matter-of-fact all my precious days, and I call Jack changeable. He's as set as Pikes Peak. He'll be the stubbornest mule in the pasture to work this thing out with, because he's good clear through. I'm the chameleon. I went out to a dinner and a two hours' call almost hating, and surely distrusting, all women; seeing only the Sidol vampire, the dear 'Little Colorado' weakling, the hard-hearted, too-good Leslie. And—yes, I registered a vow never to trust any woman again. Well, that was only 'playlike,' as the children used to say, to get out of something. I did make one mental reservation for that Janis Gwin. The little villain said I'd meet my fate in five hours. She missed it on that, if she did hit in on the 'small dark man.' I'll be going West too soon to meet any fate in New York. Yes, I'll except Janis from my vow—and one other. They are as far apart, though, these two I am honoring with my worthless trust, as Hell Gate and the Golden Gate. But I still maintain that Janis is a trump. No, she's the joker in the deck. And this cousin of Jack's, she's a—*woman*, and where *she*

lives is *home*. Whether it be a cave in a mountain side or an apartment overlooking the noble Hudson, she'd make it a home, because she's a real woman. There's that wire from Denver to be taken care of yet to-night. I'll rush the answer out now. I can't leave yet. I'm looking after a small, dark man who must not hang around too many elevators. He's only a tool, not a man. I can fix him easily one of these days, I believe, but you never can tell about men like that. The ones you don't count on are sometimes the very ones who control destinies. I must use my own doctrine and not misjudge the value of a tool just because it looks insignificant. Maybe it was he who jimmed the works for Jack to-night over at Miss Jannison's. Anyhow, I can't start West just yet. I'm needed here for a little while."

VIII

A DAUGHTER OF JUDAS

MRS. SIDOL'S dinner invitation had been skillfully contrived. A chance meeting at the street door gave opportunity for clinching an acquaintance begun in Cid Jannison's rooms, with Jack Lorton's introduction; the discovery of some common acquaintances, later of some dear common friends, a telephone message telling of some letters from France expressing the hope that the recipient might meet and know Miss Jannison—and the little dinner for two—to talk them all over. The general would be away for the night. Leslie's evening engagement would not be interfered with. Dinner would be at six sharp. In fact, Mrs. Sidol, herself, had an important engagement later, that would keep her in for the evening. It would be just a cozy little hour when they, who had so many common memories of a wonderful country, and common friends in that country, could chat together without interruption. The whole plan was unexacting and comfortable.

However brutal and deceptive the old masters

may have chosen to paint the first Judas Iscariot, the sons and daughters of Judas Iscariot in the twentieth century may possess remarkably handsome faces, and with this beauty may combine the manners of an angel. Mrs. Sidol was perfect this evening. The event brought to her guest the realization, too, of how much the setting may do to bring out a woman's charms. Leslie tried to picture her hostess in the huts in France where she herself had been. She had seen women almost as slender, yet marvelously strong, doing seemingly impossible tasks there. But she gave up trying to change a line for this graceful creature. Heaven made her to rule in a little kingdom with a queenliness that must have scope and pomp—and Mrs. Sidol obeyed the will of Heaven. To-night there was no inharmonious note in dress or adornment or manner or dinner or background. The one chord ajangle was the children, and they appeared but briefly. Yet before they went into total eclipse they had given sufficient proof to the guest of the ease with which children may destroy the harmony of domestic functioning.

The children were handsome like their mother, and perfectly dressed. But there was an unnatural grown-upness about them; and from being courteous and timid at first, they developed a rebelliousness that was little short of impish, and were finally exterminated by an unsympathetic and unattractive governess. Their going left a sense

of relief, coupled with a sense of painful wonder, in the mind of the guest, as to how bloody might be the struggle behind nursery battlements before these little ones would escape, through sheer fatigue, into unhappy slumber. This episode past, Mrs. Sidol was peerless again.

"I'm so interested in your welfare work, Miss Jannison, I want to know more about it," she declared, earnestly. "I shall have plenty of time on my hands soon. I'm sending the children to the country to stay until next September with their aunt. She is a maiden lady and can manage them wonderfully. They don't take any privileges with her. Once they are out of the way, I can begin to be really useful."

Leslie's study of child life, the scientific anlaysis and tabulation of body, mind, and soul, had been brief but intensive. The hostess's opportunity for immediate usefulness with the children in this home might have impressed her more had Mrs. Sidol not changed quickly to an inquiry after the orphan children of France, the starving Near East —the leaders of the movements to aid all these, the men and women that both knew abroad, especially the men, first in welfare work, then in the army—and here she rested. It was Leslie who was telling her now, Leslie who expressed all the opinions, Leslie who asked if she knew this and that prominent personage. But she did not underestimate her guest. Leslie was neither

young nor unsophisticated nor deceptive. And the real purpose of this dinner affair must be skillfully put. She had no hope of catching her guest off guard.

"I'll hurry the salad in. I must not forget your eight-o'clock appointment, nor, incidentally, my own engagement, although, important as it is, I wish I might forget it. But when one has a disagreeable thing coming, isn't it best to rush it through with a stiff courage, Miss Jannison? Are you going far for the evening? Excuse my questionnaire type of conversation."

How beautiful the curve of the red lips, how wonderful the crown of golden hair, how engaging the light in the deep-blue eyes of this gracious woman. No wonder Jack Lorton had been bewitched by her in France, where life was so different in so many ways. Leslie, herself, had put Jack by, forever; she would be magnanimous over his seeming infatuation here. It couldn't mean so very much, could it? Oh, could it?

"No, I'm not going far. My friends will send their car to the door for me, and bring me home. All very easy," Leslie replied to her hostess's question.

"And my other question, what is your philosophy of life? You make such a grand success of it. I don't mean that in flattery. I merely mean, you keep in calm seas, away from the troublous reefs I'm forever striking. Is your

welfare work your ambition, or your refuge? Do you ever have important engagements you dread?"

"It's both," Leslie said, frankly, "as all work is sooner or later, I suppose, and I have engagements I dread. I have one to-morrow that I wish was over."

Mrs. Sidol looked meditatively into her salad plate.

"Oh, if one could only put everything off till to-morrow! But isn't life queer, anyhow?"

"Very, with grades and grades of queerness," Leslie replied.

Then they chatted of other things, growing intimate over costumes and face creams, the whole gamut of the walrus and the carpenter, and France, and men, and summer resorts, and the contrast between prewar Paris and to-day, and men and the latest drama, and common acquaintances, and *men*. Leslie wondered the next day how they ever managed to come to the last and greatest topic of the evening, men; and how her hostess ever came to confide in her and make her feel important in this confidence; and why she had let herself listen to, or be made so nearly a party to all of Mrs. Sidol's interests. She did not know that many men had wondered over the same things, and she might have been flattered, in a way, to have known how few women had ever been so honored. But so it was.

"I mustn't stay over my time, nor keep you," Leslie said, as the delicious dinner was ending.

"You can't overstay, my dear Miss Jannison, and the longer you are here the happier I am. You see, I'm alone this evening, for the general is out of the city. I'm going to tell you something. You will not repeat it, I know."

"Pardon me," Leslie began. But how could Mrs. Sidol's "something" affect her? "Don't trust strangers too far," she added, with a smile, looking at her hostess with a direct gaze that made the woman hesitate.

"Why, we can never be strangers after this! We have too many common interests overseas, and here. My dear old friend of happy war memories—only I'm married now, but I wasn't then—he and you are friends, too. Talk about strangers, it isn't possible again for us."

All this was said sweetly. Then came pathos into the play, and Mrs. Sidol was dear in pathos.

"Let me tell you truly why I dread to-night," she went on hurriedly and all softly. "The general is away. An old friend of mine, a one-time, and it seems for-all-time, infatuated friend is calling this evening. He knows my husband is away, so he insists on this interview to-night. I had his note this afternoon. Well, you may know how it is by this time, not fully, though, till you are married. Take my advice, never marry; and if you do," with an arch smile at the remembrance

of the early evening, "thrice over, never have children. They can spoil anything God ever made."

"I'm not likely to do one or the other," Leslie assured her, wishing that the present interview had not taken this turn.

"You are a dear, darling girl; you'll be sure to marry somebody. Then trouble begins. Not that this infatuation could ever have influenced me—but let it go. The gentleman who calls to-night vows he'll leave town, all for my sweet sake. Well, it's awful. Once you really and truly love a man, you'll know what the blind admiration and persistence of another man may mean, and how it gets in your way and spoils your life. But it must be met; I mean this evening must be lived through somehow. I'm glad General Sidol is out of town; but then this man friend comes only in his absence. His last note would not permit a refusal."

Just then a servant, a small, dark man, came in.

"You are wanted at the telephone, Mrs. Sidol," he announced.

"Excuse me a minute, Miss Jannison. I know what it is. Get Miss Jannison that volume of Maeterlinck," to the servant. "It is beautifully illustrated."

As Leslie took the book a scrap of paper serving as a bookmark fell out of it. She picked it up, hoping to put it back at the right page. As she smoothed its crumpled corner carefully her eyes

fell on the signature upon it. She knew that big round hand always. At one glance, in spite of herself, she had read what Janis Gwin called "the chewed-off corner" of Jack Lorton's note to Bryce Carroday taken merely for the signature, without regard to the words attached to it. It was only one reading, but the words burned themselves in too perfectly to be forgotten, and Leslie's heart turned to stone.

nothing
in N. Y. C. when you are
Wait for me, Beloved—
Your only—

JACK.

Leslie did not close the book, and she lifted a calm face to her hostess on her return. It was the hostess, herself, who seemed too perturbed for even her wonderful self-control and politeness to hide her feelings completely.

"She must have remembered that scrap of paper too late," Leslie thought to herself.

Either this girl's direct way of doing things or her readiness to accept this sort of testimony regarding Jack Lorton made her unsuspicious, for the time, of the paper having been put there for her to find. What troubled Leslie most now was that her hostess's caller was coming and she, herself, was in the way. She did not realize until long after this night that what she had heard of Jack in France had come only from the very persons

whom she and Mrs. Sidol had known in common. She rose at the first moment to say good-by.

"You'll come again. We mustn't lose each other now, must we?" Mrs. Sidol said, sweetly.

When a woman's main pleasure is in the winning of men's hearts, the secondary inevitable pastime is in the breaking of women's hearts. Mrs. Sidol practiced both and measured her success by the results.

"I thank you for the evening, Mrs. Sidol," Leslie said, in a perfunctory tone, in spite of her wish to be agreeable.

"I thank *you*. I hope the remainder of your evening will be all you could wish. You will make it delightful for your friends, anyhow."

"And I wish—" Leslie paused.

"Oh yes, I wish it, too; you mean the remainder of my evening. It can't be. He's due any minute, now—but after to-night comes the exodus. My friend will leave the city soon, I'm sure of that. I hope the unhappy affair you dread to-morrow may not make you too unhappy. You will meet your troubles bravely. Good-by. Yes, my friend is due. Good-by."

It angered Leslie Jannison to have even the intimation that her affair, the automobile case, was similar to this mild flirtation on the lady's part and the mad infatuation of the man friend, due any minute. As she stood waiting in the shadow of a column at the elevator entrance, Jack Lorton

plunged down the stairway and walked straight to Mrs. Sidol's door. By his flushed face and his frowning black brows Leslie knew that he was intensely wrought up. The small, dark man opened the door for him and he disappeared inside. The elevator that carried her to the street floor just then seemed to Leslie like a coffin lowering her into her own grave.

Jack Lorton had flung himself down the two flights of stairs from the Jannison apartment when he learned from Ellis that this call, "urgent and important," came from only two floors below. And his stay in Mrs. Sidol's apartment was brief in spite of the gracious welcome given him.

"I didn't know you were in this house," Jack said, as Mrs. Sidol greeted him.

"No, I'm surprised to find myself here, but I took your advice and left the hotel, you see. I went farther; I have the children home for a little while. Am I not good?"

"Very good. Don't stand, Lady Hostess," Jack said, courteously.

"You are good to come at my call, Jack," Mrs. Sidol said, when they were seated cozily near together for a conference. "I need you. You are true to your promise to help me. And I am not alone in my needs. There are others you can help also, Jack."

"Well," Jack responded.

" 'Well.' You are the most original man I ever knew, Jack; you are too delicious. I don't wonder you are so admired."

"Oh, I'm killing! But how can I help you, Estelle?" Jack replied.

Mrs. Sidol paused, and looked away from her companion.

"You can't help me at all if you are not going to be serious, and you needn't stay one minute if you are really in as big a hurry as you seem to be. I'm not yet where I need that kind of friendship."

The tone was low, definite, and kindly. It made the young man ashamed of himself. After all, what had this woman ever asked of him that was difficult? She laid no heavy tax on anybody. Only, he had never trusted her, never cared for her, never was interested in her type, and he could not forget that she had badly mixed things up for Leslie and himself on the day of their meeting. But then, the "mixing" had not begun with her. It began on that ride to the farm on the day of the accident. This woman had had nothing to do with that mixing. But now Jack simply wanted to drop out of her orbit, as he had always done heretofore as soon as occasion offered. Yet here he was, and he must be a gentleman. It was easy to be a gentleman in such a charming atmosphere as the place afforded.

"My dear Estelle, you do not let me understand you. You say I can help you, but we never arrive.

Let's have this matter clear to both of us now, and if I can do anything for you, I do assure you it will be my pleasure to do it. Let's go ahead. We were interrupted before. We may be again." Jack spoke earnestly.

"Oh, we sha'n't be bothered this time as we were before. Nobody to hurry us as there was when we met in Miss Jannison's rooms."

Jack looked a question. He was in a hurry, himself.

"The general was with me then. He thought I had come to look at these apartments. He was down in the car, swearing lovely oaths behind the curtains because I stayed so long; and maybe, too, because you came down to the door with me. You remember I urged you not to come then, for I knew the consequences if you should. I got a terrible tongue lashing for that. He's so awfully jealous of every man, as I told you before. As if you and I could not be friends, the best of friends, Jack."

Mrs. Sidol put a shapely hand on Jack's arm. He gave it a little pat of assurance and waited with subdued impatience. If the general was such a foolishly jealous man he might make a scene at any moment, and Jack Lorton had no intention of getting into that sort of thing.

Mrs. Sidol read his mind at once.

"There is no cause for hurry or worry; General Sidol is in Philadelphia to-night. He can't get

back till to-morrow. There's no interruption from that source now. I had a dinner guest—your friend, Miss Leslie Jannison—but she has gone out somewhere for the evening and won't be expecting you up in your cousin's rooms. That is, of course, if you intended going up there to-night. It is lovely to have you here with me."

Jack Lorton's mind seized the situation. General Sidol was out of the city, hence this call for himself. Leslie had just left this place. Had she known of the message to him? Hardly. Mrs. Sidol didn't shout her plans to women. Jack was grateful to her for that one thing now. Yet why bring Leslie in at all? He, himself, could never attempt anything that had not a line reaching out to her somewhere. At the ends of the earth he would be longing for her judgment, her approval of anything he might do. He knew that. But why should this woman enter Leslie's world? He was amazed that she had gotten by Cid in coming into this building. Was she to outplay all the Jannisons? Jack was puzzled, sore hearted, angry. But he had learned self-control in a hard school and he was a good soldier to-night. As he sat staring at nothing Mrs. Sidol looked up with the sweet gentleness she could wear so well on occasion. And her beauty was never more alluring.

"Jack, I called you here to-night to ask a favor of you. It can't concern you personally at all, neither your health, hope, nor happiness."

"Yes," Jack replied, looking down at her.

Mrs. Sidol waited.

"I'll give you two minutes. Tell me what it is. Otherwise I'm leaving." Jack's patience was gone at last.

Mrs. Sidol did not resent his haste now, as she had resented it a few minutes ago.

"I want you to go to your friend, Bryce Carroday, and ask him to do me a favor."

"Bryce Carroday!" Jack exclaimed.

Still another invasion of territory by General Sidol's general.

"Yes, because he is connected with the law firm here that means to defend General Sidol in a divorce suit to be brought at once. No, don't interrupt me. I know what is going on. I have many friends—none truer nor dearer to me than Jack Lorton, though. Listen, please, and don't speak."

Both of Mrs. Sidol's hands were on Jack's arm now as it lay on the arm of the chair. Mechanically he put his other hand in his pocket, and, with that peculiar mental abstraction that comes under tension, began separating his keys on their ring, to find the one to his car, and the one to his strong box.

"General Sidol's only excuse is a foolish jealousy, but you know a lawsuit may be twisted into anything. Your friend, Mr. Carroday, is in the firm that is interested in helping to save an estate for

the Sidol family. If he makes it clear to the firm that this divorce will interfere with that, as it will, they will persuade the general to let matters stand, at least for the present. Otherwise there will be loss of property, broken homes, children disgraced —oh, everything that's bad. Jack, if I were your cousin, your sister, you'd help me. I'm far more than these. I'm your good friend, a friend who needs your sympathy and help and good will. Go to Bryce Carroday to-morrow and ask him, as your friend, to grant me this. He'll do anything for you because he is your friend. He loses nothing. You lose nothing. But I gain everything. Will you help me? You have promised you will."

Jack Lorton took mental stock of the proposition quickly. On the one hand was himself, supposed to be a big, generous-hearted, chivalric fellow, knowing himself to be in love with the world, proud of his work, and the beauty of it, with one great wish in his life unfulfilled, on account of a girl—but that was his own business—with no reason for withholding from a kindly act toward anybody, least of all a pretty, pleading woman who said nobody else lost anything and she gained everything from the small favor. On the other hand was a deeper entangling, where his one wish was for freedom. It implied the attitude of defender. It opened the way for continued championship. It involved a tacit or open antag-

onism between himself and General Sidol, who by testimony was jealous of him. And it meant—truly he read that line aright—it meant that Jack's heart was in the matter—at the last analysis—for a time to be played with, then thrown aside with a wifely virtue of fitness for ending affairs properly, and all that. But—on the face of it—what could he do now? The whole matter might be settled in ten minutes to-night. Was it so big a thing to help one woman whose presence was magnetic? To-morrow he would travel with a woman who in her frank, kindly way would repel him at every turn. Jack hesitated, knowing well that hesitation is the first step toward yielding.

"Estelle, my dear, I can't go to Bryce to-morrow. I'm leaving town and I can't be back till late Saturday night—or Monday morning. Rather a difficult thing coming off up north."

Mrs. Sidol caught the import of this excuse. It meant delay, not refusal. The young man could be managed in the end.

"Oh, the world is full of difficult situations! Miss Leslie Jannison was telling me what a disagreeable journey was ahead of her for to-morrow, and how she dreaded it," she commented.

Jack frowned involuntarily.

"Yes, going up the Connecticut with me is beastly disagreeable, I've no doubt." Jack didn't say this aloud.

"Next week may be too late. Jack, maybe you

can see Mr. Carroday yet to-night. I want this matter adjusted as soon as General Sidol gets back to the city. It is so slight a thing for you. It means everything to me."

The pretty woman leaned forward and clasped the young man's arm pleadingly. A slender, loving creature for whom all men must take that part of the marriage vow—"to honor her, protect her—" Truly Jack Lorton had need to be a good soldier. The moment was charged with yielding impulses.

Just then two children in fluffy white nightrobes burst through the door, one whimpering, the other belligerent, escaping from the grasp of a homely, angry governess.

"Mamma, mamma," the two chorused, "she spanked us hard and we weren't doing a thing, only singing to ourselves to keep from being afraid. And she turned off the lights. You said we could have the lights on till we went to sleep—"

But the irate nurse had them in her grip now, and was fawning for all manner of forgiveness from the company present.

In an instant Mrs. Sidol had changed from the beautiful, entrancing woman to be petted and adored, to an angry, harsh-voiced, unloving parent.

"Take them away and don't let me hear from them or you again till luncheon time to-morrow. I've told you for the last time about controlling

them. If you can't make them mind, spank them hard," she ordered.

"Oh, mamma, mamma, come in with us, please do!" wailed the whimperer, as the nurse spent herself on the kicking, struggling belligerent, and the face of the pleading child seemed irresistible.

"Hush right up or you can't get up at all tomorrow," the mother replied, with a hardness of which the soft-voiced Mrs. Sidol would have seemed incapable. And with a great burst of childish grief and disappointment the two were swept out of sight.

As they disappeared the woman turned to her guest, but it was the real Jack Lorton, sure and unafraid, who sat beside her now.

"They grow more like their father every day. Captain Kilwarth was unbearable in his home. Can't you see how terrible it is to live with his children?" she asked, pathetically.

"Yes, I see. I'm sorry for you," Jack replied.

Mrs. Sidol took his words comfortingly. They meant all she needed. But Jack's mind was running back to his own childhood; to the kindly firmness of his mother; the big-hearted affection of his father; the happy good nights in a bedroom dear to the recollection of his little-boyhood. And two green mounds up in the Lorton-Jannison graveyard were reconsecrated sacred to blessed memories.

"Estelle, it is impossible for me to see Bryce Carroday to-night. At the first opportunity I'll have it out with him. Meantime I remember there's a whale of a lot to be done before I leave town to-morrow. You'll excuse me now. What I can do for everybody's welfare, before Heaven, I'll do. Good-by, Mrs. Sidol. Good-by."

Jack took her hand and held it as he looked down at the fair, drooping head. It was such a pitifully little thing to help this dainty creature who knew how to make her affection felt. It would be so easy there to take her in his strong arms and comfort her. But—the Sidol children had turned the tide for Jack Lorton.

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"I cannot see Bryce and Cid again to-night. I was not deceiving Estelle Sidol in that declaration. They may think the 'urgent call' took the whole evening, and I'll let them keep on thinking so. I am in no mood for explanation now. Nobody who didn't know that woman could understand the situation, least of all a man like Bryce Carroday. Cid might be quicker to grasp the thing, but it would be as a woman sees, not from a man's viewpoint. There was a time when Leslie —but there isn't any Leslie any more. I will keep forgetting that. Well, the world is wide. I have told Cid that I mean to leave New York soon. Now I'll hurry that leaving. Somewhere

out in the vague West there is work with forgetfulness. I'll go out and find it. Bryce will be going soon, anyhow. He wants to change engineers in that mining business, and hopes I can see my way clear to be the other man. I see it clear as a bell, and we can still be together, for a while at least."

So Jack thought as he stole upstairs for his hat and then hurried down to the street.

"Mrs. Sidol will never stop because I failed her to-night, and if the general is jealous and hunting divorce argument, he can find it all right. I don't care a darn what they do, but if she ever catches me in her net again, well, I'll deserve what's coming to me. As for the rest of the evening—when a fellow has no place to go he can always go to work. Me for the office of J. Fairborough Lorton, C.E."

Down in the office Janis Gwin was busy to-night finishing some work that must be gotten out of the way before Jack should leave to-morrow. "Peter Rabbit," her husband, was helping her in and out. That was "Peter Rabbit's" business in life—a small, white-faced man, with eyes too bright and the high spot on his cheek bones too rouge-red, and the little nagging cough too suggestive, to be misunderstood.

Jack sat down at his desk and watched the two for a while.

"Come here, you cubs; I want to talk to you," he said at length.

"I haven't got a thing to do but listen. No work ever piles up here," Janis declared, with a saucy flirt of her red head. But she brought a chair to the desk at once, and "Peter Rabbit" came and leaned, like a weary man, over the back of it.

"What would you say, 'Live Wire,' if I'd leave here and go out West for a while?" Jack inquired, looking quizzically at Janis.

The girl gave him a quick, penetrating glance, then answered, carelessly:

"I'd say I'd stay here, I s'pose, and keep an eye out for business. Lots of things needs watchin' round a place like this." She paused, then added, still more indifferently, "I forgot to tell you your friend you had an engagement with, the one I took down the note for—he waited quite some while for you this afternoon."

"Yes. Too bad."

Jack was not thinking of the afternoon just now.

"Oh, he wasn't lonesome, I guess. Had a swell caller, little blond fluff, style on wheels, slim and waspy, voice as soft as Jersey cream. Come to see him—special delivery."

Janis looked down to hide the mischief in her eyes. She knew that her employer seldom heard a word of her idle gossip. If he flared up now it would mean something.

"What do you mean, Janis? Who was here?" Jack demanded.

"I don't know her. She didn't take much notice of us 'inmates' out in the main office. Gladys, the girl in the law offices on the second floor up, she says her name's Sidol. That's all the footnotes I got on her 'who's who.' She asked for Mr. Carroday, and said, deliciouslike, she was a friend of his. Shall I put all them Saint Lawrence drawings together now, or wait till you get back, Mr. Lorton?"

"There's no hurry about that. You may go now. Good night. Here, take a taxi. You both look tired," Jack declared, thrusting a bank note into Janis Gwin's hand.

As Janis put on her wraps in the outer office, she said to her husband:

"'Peter Rabbit,' I think 'Big Sister' 'd better go West. Lots of what you call atmosphere out there. He'll bring some of it with him when he comes back again. Wouldn't you love it if we could go West sometime?"

"Do you s'pose he'll ever come back?" "Peter Rabbit" inquired, ignoring her question.

"Yeah. And this whole thing's better 'n a movie. There'll be a lot of actin' done before the lights go out on this drammer, too. See if there ain't. I got a small part of my own to play yet. I'm good for a curtain call or two, me ain sel'. Then I'll write it all into the great American

novel I'm getting ready to produce, and it 'll be a 'best seller' for some seasons, and we'll be rich and famous. Golly!"

Meanwhile, the Gwins being dismissed with their taxi fare paid, Jack Lorton was alone with his thoughts.

"So Estelle has already met Bryce Carroday. Strange how forgotten things come back. I do recall now that she said something to me once in France about some property possibilities in Colorado. As I remember it she was referring to her first husband, Number One, now deceased. Maybe some way she came to know Bryce out West. Either she prepared him for me or failed with him entirely. Strange he didn't mention it to-night. Only, she's not good table talk, especially at Cid Jannison's table. Maybe he won't say anything unless I do. She can tie him easier than she could me, for he's too matter-of-fact to suspect anything till it's too late, not having known her in France. And, after all, he still feels the loss of that Colorado sweetheart more than he lets on, too. Oh, Estelle will gather him in, and the jealous general will be 'horribly jealous' some more. He has that law firm here for his attorneys. He may know Bryce already."

Jack thought deeply, then struck his desk with his open palm.

"The general saw me when I bowed his wife into the coupé from Cid's the other day. He must also

have seen Bryce, for he left first, and that darned car was right at the curb then. But where was Estelle then? Great Cæsar's ghost! I felt through my seventh sense that somebody was in Cid's room when I went in, and again while we were talking. She was snooked down in that davenport, like a bug in a crack. How did she get in? Her servant must have hoodooed Ellis, I reckon. Smart servant, I'll say. She couldn't have heard all we said, because we weren't shouting, but— Oh—the devil!"

Jack sprang to his feet and kicked his chair aside.

"Well," he exclaimed, "I may be a failure, myself, in women's affairs, but, by the Lord Harry! I'll not let that boy of my heart be trapped. I'll see this through. I've a record for bringing down aircraft over French battlefields. This Sidol ship's not going to drop any bombs on Bryce Carroday's camp. I'll see to that. I'll take him up the Connecticut with me to-morrow. Make it less painful for Leslie to have somebody else along. I'll call him yet to-night. He won't mind being roused out of sleep by me, I know, and I don't care if he does. If you waken a man while you are carrying him out of a burning building, he oughtn't kick about his nap being broken up."

Then the query of what Estelle Sidol might have said to Leslie in that dinner hour rose up to

plague him. And, although he told himself emphatically that it would not change her mind a bit, anyhow, no matter what she heard, and that she was out of his game forever, the question remained unanswered.

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It was just midnight when Bryce Carroday's telephone rang.

"Hello! This is Carroday."

Evidently the speaker was wide awake and calm.

"I wonder what's keeping him at it. That call this afternoon must have fixed him like my evening did me," Jack thought, as he hesitated an instant before he responded:

"This is Jack, Bryce. What's keeping you out so late?"

"Waiting for you to call me. When a man excuses himself for a *few minutes* on 'brief and urgent business,' his guest doesn't feel quite like running off till he gets back," Bryce declared.

"You go to—all the double dashes in the type case," Jack replied.

"I would if I had any 'brief and urgent business' that way. What's on your mind this morning?" Bryce asked.

"I want you to go up north with me on that damage case. I've a notion there may be need for a good lawyer. You see, we—that is, Leslie and I, I mean—"

"I see. You two aren't 'we' any more. Anybody can see that."

"Oh, confound you, Bryce Carroday! Cid's dinner must have gone wrong with you! Will you go, or not?" Jack demanded.

"The answer is, 'I will,' if you won't insult your splendid cousin again. When do we—you and I, I mean—get back?" Bryce asked.

Jack waited. He had said so many times that there wasn't any Leslie now, that he half believed it himself. But—the Connecticut Valley, that old Jannison home, dear with the recollections of a happy boyhood, dearer with the memories of a joyous young-manhood, the necessity of clearing himself with Leslie from any Sidol entanglement, if such clearing were possible, the hope still alive within him, that he had declared to himself was dead—all these were controlling his answer.

"Say, Bryce, I know you are in a hurry to get back to Denver, but, just for old sake's sake, couldn't you stay over Sunday up at the old place I've told you about so often? I've promised Leslie's father a dozen times to go up there for the week-end. He's the last one living of his generation, of three old families up there, and the two old folks that run the place are delicious. Could you stay over, Beloved?"

"Oh, I might. Yes, I believe I could. I've not met Miss Leslie yet, you recall," Bryce replied.

"It's the very time to do it. Say, Bryce, I've

an idea. You rather stood for Cid, didn't you?" Jack exclaimed.

This time the hesitancy was at the other end of the line.

"She's very charming," in a level, uninspiring tone.

"Great whiz!" Jack put his hand over the transmitter and whistled. " 'Very charming.' All right, B. Carroday, we'll let it go at that." Then into the instrument he continued: "I've a notion to take her along. She's not often in the way, Cid isn't."

"All right. I'll meet you at the station. I was half through my 'Now I lay me' when you called. I'll finish now. Good night, old scout." Bryce's receiver clicked to its place.

"Well, he might be decent about it—act like a guest, even if I am a rotten host. I'll begin on this going West with him to-morrow, if he's too precious drowsy to talk shop to-night. I'll bet a dollar he's not moved for an hour. Everything's gone wrong to-night. But to-morrow the sunshine and the Connecticut Valley and Cid, if I can get her to go, may work wonders. Well. This is the end of a perfect day."

IX

A VERDICT RENDERED

THE damage suit in the automobile-truck case had been pushed with record-breaking speed. The defendants—the owners of the truck and the driver—were to be assisted by a shrewd attorney of the browbeating type. The plaintiffs, the father and mother of the dead child, were to be supported by a lawyer of their own choosing, who worked for pay first, and for principle afterward. Back of these was Leslie Jannison's brother, Carey, whose farm lay nearest to the stricken home in the woods. Carey Jannison's generosity was known throughout the countryside. He was not an aggressive man, but he was stubborn. He had no personal interest in this case further than to help this poor, shiftless family a bit, to what consolation a little money may bring for what no money can replace, and to put a check on reckless truck driving, which he believed to be a growing menace to life and limb on the New England highways. He reasoned that if damage was due for the loss of a horse or other property, it was

so much the more due for the loss of a child, whether rich or poor, but especially to the poor. So he had been the prime mover in bringing about this lawsuit and the early call to trial.

The case needed pushing, for the father, big, ignorant, and easy-going, evidently was not deeply impressed by the incident. To him death was a common human event, and its cause lay in the unknown ways of a Providence that kept him poor and made Carey Jannison rich; his crops weed grown and puny, and the Jannisons' farms, up and down the Connecticut River, thrifty and fair to see.

"It wasn't no use to sue nobody," he declared. "He hadn't no money and no chanct. Wouldn't git enough out 'n it to pay the intrust, let alone the mortgage on his propputty."

The mother, dazed and cowed, had no mind about the matter. Women weren't supposed to have minds in her world, anyhow. She needed everything that money could buy, but a million dollars wouldn't bring back her little girl, who could help her so much; and 'twould be 'most like blood money, wouldn't it, to take it, even if they won the suit? If they lost—Cal Jannison would hafto pay the costs. He generally took care of what nobody else cared for, and done it for nothin'.

The day of the trial found a crowded court-room, with the air charged with intense local interest. The judge was a rather benevolently

inclined elderly man, who held his office more through family tradition than through especial judicial acumen. His father, both of his grandfathers, and several forbears ahead of these, had been on the bench, never any of them, however, rising to superior places in the judicial functioning of the state. Two thirds of the jury were farmers. The other third, villagers. All men of the type in country or town who seldom form an opinion on anything so long as one is formed for them; but, being formed, they grasp it and hang on with an unbreakable tenacity, as if they had been sole inventors, owners, and beneficiaries of the same.

All of the available space was filled to the last inch with spectators. They crowded upon the portion set aside for the attorneys and principals in the case. They even encroached upon the jury box and the witness stand, and, but for the busy little one-armed bailiff, one zealous mother would have planted her two-year-old child on the judge's desk while she found the younger baby's milk bottle and adjusted the law of supply and demand in the local situation. Lazy old village loafers and sharp-eyed little women busybodies, with open-mouthed tow-headed boys, who are always among those present on such occasions, crowded the front ranks. Behind these were the stalwart citizenry—the butcher and the baker and the banker, with the farm owner and his hired

help, women with babies, bashful young fellows with curious-eyed sweethearts, with a wedging in of boys and girls still young enough to crowd and giggle—all very gawky and pin-feathery.

In this compact body might be noted now and then a student face, a deeply sympathetic countenance, a serious appreciation of the occasion. The minister of the country church in the Jannison-Lorton neighborhood, the superintendent of the village schools, the head official of the local Woman's Christian Temperance Union wearing her little white-ribbon bow, unmistakable badge of womanhood.

The interest of the day did not center more in the chief participants of the case than in the four young people who had come up from the city that morning to be present at the trial. Especially did the big, well-dressed, fair-faced stranger take all eyes. Jack Lorton and the two Jannison cousins were always an interesting and welcome sight. They belonged to the Connecticut Valley. The crowd had a proprietary interest in them always, and comment on how well they looked, what they were doing, and the like, was, as usual, a theme of talk. But why this other man? There being no answer, the crowd stared all the harder at the stranger.

Jack and Leslie sat together through the trial. Behind them Cid Jannison and Bryce Carroday watched the proceedings. Opposite, a representa-

tive of the owners of the truck, a brusque business man, clearly bored beyond any words by the whole thing, sat and waited for the foolishness to end, the sentimental stuff to be delivered, the tears to flow, and the quick, final ending of the matter in the right way, else why should he spend time here? It couldn't move too fast for him. He wasn't there to entertain that bunch of country rubes, a man of his business affairs.

As the case developed the line of defense became evident. The truck driver, who had wilted under Jack Lorton's command, was a mighty belligerent when backed by his employers and his attorney. His defense was to declare that he had struck the child to save collision with the other car and so making a still greater calamity. That he had stopped and made the litter, and had carried the little one home himself, and so forth.

The father and mother could make only a poor plea, and they fell down utterly on cross-examination. Especially the mother, who, in her excitement, couldn't tell the age of the dead child correctly, nor how many children were still living. Her fright was quickly translated by the defense to be the result of her trying to get what she knew she had no right to ask for. Her very motherhood was ridiculed; and with sneers and grins the lawyer dismissed her—a star witness for the defense without any effort on his part, he declared.

The plaintiff's lawyer had not the foresight to

put Jack Lorton at his best. Jack was accurate, concise, definite, and able to stand all the fire of cross-examination. But this attorney always took the line of least resistance when only a small fee was in prospect, and soon let Jack go as an indifferent asset. The defense was shrewd enough to avoid him entirely. Carey Jannison came in for the hardest attack. He left the witness stand with the jury informed that he held the mortgage on the plaintiff's little freehold—every mother's son of the twelve knowing that he had held it for years, and that, with or without the interest, he would never foreclose; that he had paid the doctor's bill, and the nurse's bill, and all the funeral expenses; and that he, himself, had instigated the plaintiffs to bring suit, who otherwise would have settled with the company's claim agent; if, indeed, they would not have let the matter drop as a lamentable accident for which no one could be blamed. Under skillful cross-examination the defense left the broad suggestion that all the damage money asked for would just about pay the obligation of these poor people to the rich man, Carey Jannison. Hence he had forced them into unwillingly suing the defendant for his own profit.

Late in the afternoon, although there was only one more witness for the plaintiffs, the defense asked for a recess until evening. This meant that the witnesses from the city would be delayed over

Sunday and pile up the costs of the suit. But the judge was kindly disposed toward the defense. The showing against it had been poor so far, and clearly personal, with a covert aim as to the disposal of the money in case of a decision for the plaintiff. Anyhow, the defense deserved this consideration. So the recess was granted.

The crowd dispersed somewhat. A rain was threatening to fall and a few turned regretfully homeward. Some hurried away quickly in order to be present when the evening session opened. But the notion that something interesting would happen before the verdict came, and the intense interest in the coming verdict, kept most of the audience close to the courtroom, especially those in the front row of seats, who chose to hold their places of vantage, supperless, rather than to miss anything of this unusual event, about which they would expatiate for years to come. So they gossiped and guessed and expressed opinions freely, but they held their seats. The defendants, with their attorney, hurried to the nearest restaurant, hurried through a brief meal, and hurried back to the courtroom, all with an air of assurance that matters would be rushed to a conclusion immediately. Meanwhile Carey Jannison took the plaintiffs, with their lawyer and the Lorton party, to the hotel, and ordered an early dinner. It was the mother's first meal in a public house. She fumbled her cup and choked on her coffee

and dropped her knife on the floor. Jack noted how quickly and adroitly Leslie came to her rescue, and how gratefully the poor woman turned toward her. Surely the gift of service was Leslie's, and the realization that she would always be the most wonderful girl in the world to him came overwhelmingly upon him.

Over in the restaurant the lawyer for the defense was jubilant, sure that a compromise would be forthcoming. Neither the plaintiffs nor these witnesses from the city wanted to stay here longer. He had broken down every bit of evidence of deliberate damage so far, he told his clients. The stupidity of the plaintiffs' attorney had reduced the influence of that young civil engineer, who wasn't driving the car, anyhow; it was the young lady who got rattled and ran her car into the truck. All this would be brought out through the cross-examination of the last witness, Miss Leslie Jannison, who was a woman and easy to ball up, and it would be *rich.*

On the other hand, the plaintiffs' counsel in the hotel lobby was negotiating for an immediate settlement. There wasn't a ghost of a show to win now. Better get the best terms at once and end the thing when there was an ending possible. So he urged his clients and those supporting them.

"You've had your say now. You'll all be kept here till Monday, and the costs will be enormous. Lorton here's out of it. They didn't even cross-

question him. Carey, you're tied hand and foot. No move now will save that jury. They've got you down for hunting back pay for yourself, and you know what a jury of farmers do to a man in that fix. The parents here didn't put up any fight at all. I can't *make* evidence. That's not a lawyer's business. Too bad the doctor couldn't 'a' been here, but his deppisitions didn't carry any weight. There's only the young lady left to testify, and they're going to make it awfully unpleasant for her. I'm on to the line they're going to put up—pretend she and the young man were too busy making love to each other to see what was going on. She'd better not get into it. It's going to be rough. If she was a man, now, maybe she could best 'em, but she's only a woman. What do you say is the least you'll consider from that truck company? They'll pay something to get off easy."

The father grinned approval. Carey Jannison's face was stern, but he said nothing. Jack Lorton knew that the attorney did not intend to make any further use of him, and he frowned and turned away. Cid Jannison, beside Leslie, and Bryce Carroday in the background, were only interested spectators, of course. But the mother lifted a sad face as the realization of what it would mean to her benefactress dawned on her.

"No amount of money will ever bring my little girl back to me, and she was so good always.

You can't pay for them things in money," she said, drearily. "But still I was hopin' for a little extry to git a comfortabler bed if any of the rest of 'em got sick; and I was hopin', too, for some way to buy a little white stun for our girl's grave. I don't want her layin' forever without no mark to show where, up there with the Lortons and Leslies and Jannisons all under big white moniments, laying like a pauper from the poorhouse, and her dyin' to save the baby's life, too. Ain't that some little like Jesus Christ done, back on Calvary? But if it's goin' to make Miss Leslie put to feelin' bad, and them bullyraggin' her and ridiculin' her about her sweetheart, I don't want to hurt her, nuther."

"It's all up to you, Miss Jannison, you see, so we'll call it quits, and I'll go right over to the restaurant and call their lawyer. Name your sum," the attorney urged, glibly.

Jack Lorton, who had turned his back on the man, whirled round and faced him. Carey Jannison looked at the floor. He knew his sister. Cid was watching the poor, hopeless mother. But Bryce Carroday leaned forward with his eyes on Leslie, a great longing gathering force within him; a wish for this girl, that in time of peace, in the day of smaller things, she might measure up to the standard of womanly courage that had made her so wonderfully brave in her womanly way in the stress of war.

The whiteness of the girl's face, the whiteness of a righteous anger, made her dark eyes the more luminous as she looked steadfastly at the lawyer, and her voice was low, but clear and cutting.

"I am the most directly concerned in this matter. It lies between the truck driver and myself. I am your strongest witness. I demand a hearing. I urge you two"—turning to the plaintiffs—"not to settle this now. Never mind what they say of me. I'm not afraid of a lawyer. I've faced worse things than a jury box. And remember, I've always been your friend."

"Let's go right on, mister; we won't stop now," the father declared.

In the mother's grateful eyes lay ample pay for any sacrifice. Carey Jannison smiled complacently at his young sister. Cid gave her arm an assuring hug, while Jack Lorton turned his back upon the company and walked away. But Bryce Carroday took a step forward into the group. He was the biggest man there, tipping Jack Lorton off by an easy twenty pounds, and his was a voice of authority.

"Friends, I'm a sort of lawyer, myself. Maybe I can help a little, to-night, when the trial is resumed. I've had some experience along these lines. I offer my services absolutely free or not at all. Can I be of any use to you?"

Jack Lorton leaped back into the circle; Leslie

and her brother smiled instant approval; the father and mother stiffened with a new hope; and the lawyer drew a deep breath of satisfaction. Help without pay had a good sound to him. But what meant most to Bryce Carroday just then was the gratitude in Cid Jannison's eyes. She was reading his motives accurately and their plan was working. Life hadn't had such moments of interest for him since the last days of a triumphant service on the Marne battlefields.

"Let me go over the case with you," he said to the attorney. "We can get a lot done before seven to-night."

So the two retired to a corner of the lobby and went into a conference (Bryce was too good a lawyer to stumble into anything) and then the paid counsel gladly gave over the case to the volunteer attorney.

Darkness came early, for a spring rain was falling now. The lamps were lighted and the courtroom was packed when the hearing began again. The defense was disappointed over the loss of a compromise, but hoped to pull through with their own poor witness, the truck driver, by turning all the fire of ridicule and barnstorming fierceness on the cross-examination of a timid young woman.

The witness stand was the best-lighted spot in the room. Leslie Jannison was called to it at once. She was calm and self-possessed, and with

the glow of color in her cheeks and the fire of a winning purpose in her dark eyes she made a picture not lost on the farmer jury. Even Bryce Carroday was startled by her wonderful personality, and the sudden comprehension of Jack Lorton's loss in the loss of this fair girl's love swept over him.

The appearance of a new attorney—big, sure, and commanding—threw confusion into the enemy's camp at once, and from that moment everything went wrong.

Under Bryce's skillful direction Leslie's story was simply told, with no effort to explain away the presence of the two on the road. No detail of the accident was omitted, even to the driver's change from profanity and anger to submissive helpfulness under Jack Lorton's commanding influence. Bryce's queries brought out, too, the events of the next day, with Leslie's service till the child's death, while her guest returned to the city. All of which testimony had weight.

The legal sum of all this testimony for the plaintiffs was: that a tragedy had robbed a home of its eldest-born; that said tragedy was the result of a disregarding of the laws of the state, the unlawfully fast driving around a dangerously sharp wooded curve in the highway; and in charging without a warning signal out upon the bridge before the children could escape. That said children had been made fully aware of the coming of the witness

and her companion, on the other hand, and were standing still, waiting for her car to pass them. That the driver of the said car was able to swerve aside and prevent the crushing of the child's body under her wheels, and that her speed was not great enough to make the impact with the truck do more than to slightly damage the smaller vehicle, which was easily repaired and put to use the next day by the farm manager and Mr. Lorton. That the plaintiffs asked damages, on account of loss, for their own needs, and as a fair and equitable return for a misdemeanor that had resulted in a tragedy. The sum asked for was not exorbitant, indeed, was not at all commensurable, but its payment, for the sake of justice and safety and the state's general welfare and the future observance of the law, should not be questioned by any law-abiding, honest, humane jury.

The moral result of Leslie's testimony was startling in its influence on the court and jury and spectators. Not until it was ended and the verdict returned did the shrewdest minds there realize the skill with which Bryce Carroday's questionings, relevant or irrelevant, had developed it. By these questions Leslie Jannison unconsciously stood revealed. A young girl, sheltered in her childhood in a quiet New England farmhouse, educated in an exclusive girl's college, suddenly a Red Cross nurse in France, at the farthest front of battle lines where women were permitted

to pass. A sturdy, skillful, daring soul who scorned personal danger and hesitated not in the face of appalling peril to risk her own life in helping to save other lives. Her return to her own country, never again the New England maiden, but the noble, conscientious, welfare worker to whom humanity spells Brotherhood. Her meeting again the boy chum of her girlhood, and their homeward journey. Nothing was omitted that could anticipate anything that the defense might spring. In this particular Bryce Carroday was magnificent, yet only Cid Jannison, in all that company, saw how by this line of questioning he was lessening the distance between Jack and Leslie; that there was an invisible defense being undermined while the case in court was proceeding.

Then came the accident; the skill and coolness that saved the child's life from being instantly crushed out; the quick first aid that had prevented the little one from dying by the roadside; the ministering angel in the stricken home the next day; the long hours of the night following that; the gentle arms that eased those last hours down the shadow; the tender-hearted girl forgetting everything else in this loving service for a little child of whom the Christ has said, "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven"; the need of the world for such as she; the cry of the children for better homes, more love, more protection. Surely

nobody but Bryce Carroday could have shown all this, holding judge and jury, defendants, audience—all spellbound through the intense moments of testimony.

The trial was soon ended. True, a feeble show of resistance was put up by the defense. But the main witness, the driver, wilted under Bryce's first onslaught, and never rallied. So, from the moment that Leslie Jannison took the witness stand the thing was settled.

The quick verdict of the jury gave full damages with all costs to be paid by the defendants.

Throughout this session Jack Lorton and Cid Jannison sat in the shadowy seats in the rear of the room. As the young man listened to the proceedings he began, for the first time in his own love affair, to sit in judgment on himself. The verdict reached in his own court was not spoken, indeed, was not consciously worded, but it ran clearly through his mind, and he spared himself not an atom of severity in this mental review and decision. And this way the verdict ran:

"Jack Lorton, may the Lord forgive you for your selfishness and stupidity; your railing at women's welfare work; your scorn of social service. For you did that. You know you did. God help you to do without the love you wanted and will always want. But from this day you must always see the beauty and worth of womanly

valor and virtue that make better homes and brighter lives in a land that needs them most right now—even our beloved America."

In the shadow Jack's hand found Cid's, who gripped it firmly and, looking up into his eyes, understood, as Cid could always do—because that is what Cids are for.

The rain had ceased and the moon threw weird shadows across the smooth white road as the plaintiffs and their witnesses and new-found attorney took their homeward way; the former to the dreary little four-roomed shack beyond the thicket; the others to the big white house on the hillcrest. It was nearly midnight when Carey Jannison's car came up the driveway. In the moonlight the lacy shadows of dripping tree boughs fell across the lawn. Down the slope beyond the open fields the Connecticut River lay like a silver band along the edge of the world. The lighted lamps in the wide front hall beamed a welcome through the open doorway as the occupants of the car alighted. Aunt Rettie Nevins had a wood fire burning in the big dining-room fireplace, and candles glowing on the mantel and table.

"I didn't know what else you might want, children," she said, as she ushered the party inside, "but I know a body can almost always eat. And Jonas made this coffee for you, himself. He thought Carey'd be sure to want somethin' after all that lawin' down to the village."

Whatever might be said in favor of Uncle Jonas's coffee, it was matched by Aunt Rettie's cold chicken, hot biscuits and jelly, sweet pickles, and steaming mince pie. All of which helped to discover wonderful appetites unsuspected by these late comers until this moment.

So they snuggled down in easy chairs about the fire, and rested and ate, and *lived* in the solid comfort of a home that held a home's best gifts. To Bryce Carroday the pleasure of it all was intense almost to pain. He could understand so thoroughly what it meant to Jack Lorton to know it, love it, dream of it, and lose it.

The two young men slept that night in the special guest room of the house. Jack Lorton sat long by the window before retiring.

"This is a grand old place, Jack. I don't wonder you love it." Bryce was hanging his coat in the closet and could not see his friend's face as he answered, indifferently:

"Yep. Means a lot to me. It's nearly two centuries old, though. They built well in the beginning of America."

"What strikes me most is that a house nearly two hundred years old should be made so modern as this is. Look at this guest room. Just deliciously comfortable; two beds, mirrors, draperies, couch and rockers, electric lights in these candle-

shaped fixtures—everything one could want in any home," Bryce went on.

"Oh, Cid's rooms in New York are much more elegant, and so, I dare say, are your Denver best places," Jack interrupted. "But this has always seemed to spell the word for me. Don't forget to take in the view from the window when daylight comes, Bryce. I've loved it for twenty-eight years. Seems more like twenty-eight centuries, sometimes." Jack drew a deep breath.

Bryce Carroday turned off the lights and came over to the window, from which the vista by moonlight was entrancing. Jack made room for him on the broad window seat. Just then the clock in the big hall below struck two: the deep hour of the night, with all the silence from daylight noises, all the small unusual sounds and movements of the time of greatest stillness. The restfulness and beauty of the hour held both men quiet for a time. At length Jack Lorton spoke.

"Were you in earnest about needing me in Colorado, Bryce?" he asked.

"I surely was, and I'm more than ever in earnest since I mentioned it the first day when we met in Miss Jannison's home. A whole shipload of things has transpired since that day. The man who was posing at the job is a study. I'm not through with him yet. I'll 'see him at Philippi' one of these days. But, Jack, this work that I want you to do means more to me than the Denver firm will ever

realize. I need you. I'll explain details later. Can you go?" Bryce put the query eagerly.

"I can. I must. There are some big things to be measured up between sunrise and sunset in America, and I'm going to get a look at some of them. I've had the study of the mountain states on my brain cells long enough. And, Bryce, can't you see why I can't stay here, now? We'll pass up what we may do later. But now—Bryce, what did you do when you got home from France and found 'Little Colorado' married? Oh, I forget you aren't the darned idot I am."

Bryce Carroday leaned forward and studied the moonlit landscape beyond the window—the silvery drops gleaming on the leaves, the long black shadows athwart great pools of light, and the soft gray blur into which all the scene fused afar.

"I don't remember," he said at last. "One thing I do know—the sting of it was never so slight, the memory of it so far away, as it is to-night. What's that blue-black-gray line on the rim of the universe away out yonder, Jack?"

"That's Gray Cliff, the north bound of the Jannison farm. The Lorton holdings are mostly west of the river, and the Leslies—my Leslie's—Cid's cousin Leslie's mother's family—lived a bit to the south on both sides of the Connecticut. The Jannison boys mostly hold these. I'm glad you need me. I'll arrange to leave the East just as soon as I get that Saint Lawrence work off."

"Can't you turn that over to a substitute?" Bryce asked.

"That's not John Fairborough's way of doing his line of work. If you can't wait for me now I'll follow later," Jack replied.

"I may have to wait. There is still a line to run in law here. You measure human minds by mathematical instruments mostly, anyhow. Let's talk a bit about France, war and women, wounds, wonders, unless you are sleepy," Bryce suggested.

"Not sleepy yet. Go ahead," Jack responded, eager to find a place where the woman now much in his thoughts might come up for discussion. Bryce must not be caught by her, at any cost.

As eagerly the young lawyer wished for the same thing. But here they failed. As subtle as Estelle Sidol, herself, was the elusive effort of each to escape the other. As deep as her own scheming was the sincerely honest effort of each to help the other. In the end they accomplished nothing, and sleep left them where their waking had found them nearly twenty hours ago.

X

"FUR TOGETHER"

THE little country church was packed the next morning, for the result of the trial had gone far by neighborhood wireless, and the human desire to "talk it over" obtains alike in town and country, the church serving the community in the latter place as the most salient distributing point.

The Sabbath day was a dream of beauty in the Connecticut Valley. The trees, clean washed by the shower of the previous night; the meadows, bespangled with rainbow-tinted drops; the breeze, purring through the pine woods; the pulse of life in garden and growing grain, with the Sabbath stillness, the peace of God, brooding over the landscape —all brought their inspiring benediction.

The Jannison car reached the church early. Jonas Nevins hadn't learned to calculate the speed of an eight-cylinder machine, save in the terms of a carriage horse, and, as nobody ever had to wait for him with the latter as a motor power, his arrival with an automobile was proportionately earlier. But to-day Jonas had a deeper motive than his

inherent principle of promptness. Didn't everybody want to see old John Lorton's boy, Jack, who hadn't been anear the neighborhood since before the war, except just once? And wasn't it always good to see Cid Jannison, who, with Jack, still owned the undivided old Lorton estate, over west? And wasn't the guest of the family the young attorney who knocked that truck company into a cocked hat last night, standing up for the rights of the poor and downtrodden? Everybody had ought to have the chance to see these people, and time to do the seeing, Jonas reasoned within him. So he sped along the winding road, by babbling brook and granite bluff, and sent the big car's nose up alongside the church door with the flourish of a conquering warrior bringing in the spoils.

And the countryside was on hand, all but organized into a receiving line of the more influential, with the less prominent assisting through the graveyard. The plaintiffs of the night before, with their family, shared in the importance of the occasion with the Jannison party. Not so much on account of their increased means from the truck company's damage money—a little fortune to them—as that they were the principals in a neighborhood tragedy. Also the little child whose life had been saved through the sister came in for much consideration, accepting in round-eyed wonder the attention paid to it. But the pathos of the moment lay in the touching tribute to the lost

one. Early that morning the children of the Sabbath school had gathered here with all the flowers that they could carry, and the unsodded mound was covered with their offerings. Sprays from cultivated shrubs and simple wayside blossoms intermingled. Beside a big white tea rose, choice cutting from some window plant, lay a bunch of yellow dandelions tied with a bit of soiled string.

Leslie and Jack went out together to the little grave because it was expected of them. As they stood beside it in thoughtful silence a little girl whispered to her brother, in an awed but audible tone:

"Lookee, Jimmie! They're sweethearts."

And Jimmie, equally awed, whispered even more shrilly:

"Why, Allie, I thought sweethearts always had holt of each other's hands! They're so *fur together*."

Involuntarily Jack and Leslie looked at each other, though neither dared to smile. But the little truism, "fur together," cut deeper than Jimmie could have dreamed.

The preacher himself added to the celebration of the event in his theme for the discourse of the day, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these," wherein Leslie's interest in the neighborhood welfare, and especially her part in the recent sad event, were glowingly set forth. And through this, as through every

other feature of the day, Jack's name was tacitly coupled with Leslie's affectionately, appreciatively, conclusively.

"If I don't get away pretty soon that man will be saying, 'Who giveth this woman?' " Jack said to himself. "She's too good for me. I know that now. But still I wish I knew just what Estelle Sidol may have said to her. My barometer tells me there is something awfully wrong there, but I can't touch it yet. Leslie may never care for me again. I know she never will, but, by Heaven! I'm going to show her sometime that I haven't one darned thing in my life to be ashamed of. I wonder what she thinks of all this to-day. I guess the love of the many you have helped means a lot more than just a fellow's whole heart, and a home, God bless her—and help me."

The old farmhouse was a haven of comfort and contentment that Sabbath day, and Leslie was hostess, friend, and cousin with charming simplicity. Bryce Carroday studied her keenly. She was a new type to him, and an intensely interesting one.

"She's just everything except the thing we most want for Jack's sake—and, yes, maybe for her own, too. I don't pretend to know what women think," he declared to himself.

And yet, when Leslie looked at him directly something in her eyes made him wonder if she might not have read his thoughts. However that

might be, she anticipated everybody's wishes easily.

"How would you all like to climb Gray Cliff this afternoon?" she asked, after dinner. "Father Jannison is in for his Sunday nap, and won't miss the world for two hours at least. And we'll have no callers till sundown. All the neighbors, including relatives and friends, have gone across the river to the old Lorton settlement to a corner-stone laying, or something else equally sacred. Mr. Carroday, Gray Cliff is about our only asset."

There was a chorus of assent at once.

Cid and Bryce exchanged glances. This had been the one thing Cid had hoped for, and wondered how to compass unsuspectingly. Jack looked eagerly at Leslie, who smiled back at him the calm, indifferent, friendly smile that is sometimes worse than a blow.

The four went out the lane and across the upland to where the pine wood lay like a great dark band along the lower slope of the granite ridge. Through this, under fragrant arching boughs, they followed aisles thick carpeted with fallen needles. At the upper line of the woodland they paused and stood looking down on the valley where the Connecticut River lay glistening in the afternoon sunlight. Below them the farmhouse, half hidden by the elms and maples, the red roof of the barn, the gardens in the open, the orchards and meadows with grazing cattle, made a picture homey, restful,

and all-American. Farther away the fields and woodlands blended into the gray-green foothills that bubble up and melt into purple mountain slopes, with their crests of filmy haze.

"You remember what I told you about this country, Mr. Carroday. To me it's the prettiest world the Big Builder ever made," Cid declared.

"She says that your New England hills woo you, but that my Rockies dare you," Bryce explained.

"I've never seen your daring Rockies, but I hope to sometime. They must be wonderful. We ought to see them, anyhow, to be good Americans," Leslie said.

Jack Lorton was gazing hungrily at the vista of valley and hillslope and low misty mountain top. He was going to leave all this soon, going to hunt in that big, wonderful, daring West for what he knew he should never find outside of New England. But however far away he, himself, might go, he wanted to think of Leslie as here. What could the West mean to her? But he must not show that feeling now.

"I suppose it is poor Americanism to climb the Alps even in a railroad train and study the classic peoples of Europe, and never see our own Switzerland, nor understand the new civilization of the West. After all, you might really be worth while out there, Bryce," he commented, teasingly.

"We have no Switzerland out West, Jack." Bryce took the defensive in an instant. "We have

something a lot better—our own God-made deserts and rivers and cañons and cliffs, and our own traditions, too, of a land old and advanced when the major part of Europe was just rising above the sea level. We have no Gothic ruins, nor Celtic ruins, either, but the ruins of a people, wise in many crafts, when the first Celt didn't know what fire meant and the first Hun wasn't much more than a primordial cell."

"A blast from the Rockies. Shut up, Bryce; you make me shiver," Jack declared. "This soft breeze through the pines is good enough for me. I wish my office girl's little husband had a whiff of it. It might help his cough."

"I'm talking of Europe, not of New England," Bryce began.

"Well, all right, Beloved, so you don't insult the Puritan ancestral seat here. It's sacred ground, 'the soil where first they trod.' Leslie, let's go find that spring above the little waterfall over yonder."

And the two strolled away. Bryce and Cid did not follow them, but, by the natural trend of another pathway, reached the top of Gray Cliff and sat looking out over Cid's "prettiest world."

"I understand why you love all this, and I can see what it means to Jack. If I belonged here and had a home like that, and a heart at peace, I'd never want to see anything else," Bryce declared. "Or maybe I'd want to go and look over the rim at

things a little just to see how good it would be to come back again."

"And yet you love your land," Cid suggested.

"Oh, I belong there. It's in my bones. I'm Colorado to the marrow. I'm thinking of Jack. He belongs here, and Miss Leslie belongs here—and you—"

"Mainly in New York City, though I love the country, too," Cid replied. "But you can *make* a home anywhere. The making isn't in the home, or the country. Like the Kingdom of Heaven, it's 'within you.' Listen to those cousins of mine over yonder."

Jack and Leslie, beyond some huge bowlders, had found the little spring bubbling out of a rocky crevice. Cid and Bryce could hear them laughing, with now and then a little shout over something, the slipping of a foothold, a stick thrown amiss, at the little waterfall, a splash of cold spray. As the two sat silent, listening to the sounds from beyond the bowlders, Bryce's face grew stern.

"Who runs the universe, anyhow?" His voice was almost a growl.

"Give it up. But it isn't run without a few wabbles for most folks, I've noted in my long career, and I have the snows of thirty winters on my head," Cid replied.

It was a fair head, well poised.

"There are some things we had better speak of now, Mr. Carroday," she continued.

"I wish you'd call me Bryce. I'm Jack's next-of-soul, among men." Bryce spoke gently.

"I want to call you that," Cid said, frankly, "but you must call me Cid. There are two Miss Jannisons—Leslie and I. You might get us mixed, and it's a penitentiary offense in New York State to call me Cinderella. But, as I say, we'd better make use of this time now. There's no telling what will happen before night, or whether we will have another minute together before you and Jack leave for the city. And first, let me thank you for last night."

"You approve?" Bryce asked, earnestly.

"It was wonderful. I caught your plan at once. You weren't fighting a bit more for the damage money for those poor people than you were for Jack to see Leslie in her true light and so break down his prejudice against her welfare service and understand her better; and you did it magnificently, too. You caught old Jack without his once suspecting you. And Jack's not easy. It's the first step, and a big one."

Bryce hesitated a little before he spoke again.

"Excuse a lawyer's bluntness, Miss—Cid, but before we go further I want to ask you if this *is* all a one-sided thing? Jack is an open book to me. I am frank to say I cannot understand Miss Leslie to-day. Either she is tremendously sincere or she plays her part well, If it wasn't for General Sidol's wife, and her designs on using Jack to reach her

own ends, I'd feel like letting go, myself. But I know what that creature is up to. Jack is as tight as wax about her. Just tried to draw me out when I gave him all chance to unbosom to me last night and this morning. But does Leslie really care for him? I know where his heart is, bless him! When he quits caring for Leslie Jannison I'll go back to Colorado and fill up the Royal Gorge with paper wads."

"Well," Cid responded, smiling, "Leslie says she doesn't care for Jack any more. But when I'm sure of that I might say that I'll grind up the Palisades of the Hudson in a coffee mill."

But the gray eyes were full of pathos and the fair face clouded as she continued:

"Jack and Leslie are the prince and princess of my fairy story. They mean all there is of life to me. I couldn't go on myself trying to untangle their threads, if I didn't know them both so well. Jack is quick and stubborn, but affectionate; Leslie is poised, seemingly indifferent, sometimes, but very kind. I believe she is playing a part now to hide a real heartbreak, for she is as proud as she is loving. Late last night when I went into her room she had just fallen asleep. There were tears on her cheeks, not yet dry, and on the stand beside her was Jack's picture, just where she could see it the first thing in the morning. It disappeared with the tears at daybreak. But at least you have overcome Jack's prejudice about her

work. That is sure, and, as I said, it is a big step. What next?"

"It's a hobby of mine that the major number of lawsuits arise out of men's misunderstandings and women's misjudgments, or *vice versa*, or maybe both in one. We don't understand, and we don't estimate values accurately. And with these two things we are so prone to forget the power of trifles. We never realize how life is measured by little things. That's the situation on Gray Cliff to-day. Those two over yonder will probably walk their separate ways. Many of us are doing that, with contented hearts at last, because somewhere we fell down on the clear insight and the wise conclusion. Psychological, legal analysis that kills romance, maybe. But sometimes for the best of us, when romance dies, the man dies also. I had it out with Jack last night about leaving New York. Not on a wild-goose chase, but with a serious purpose. He's going soon. I'm needing him on a case out in Colorado. I mistrusted the man we had for the work all along. Since I came East, just a couple of days ago, in fact, I found I'm right. He's a secret-detective-civil-engineer-serving-man combined, and hardly worth a second thought. A woman's tool, and a tool is usually more or less of a fool. Still he may be a factor to reckon with before we get through. Incidentally, Mrs. Sidol is the woman he fetches and carries for. You may have seen him somewhere."

"I haven't seen her servants yet. I've seen only her real-estate agent. He is small, too. She seems to have had her turn with you and Leslie and Jack. She hasn't reckoned with me yet," Cid said, with a smile.

"Small, too? That's interesting. As to Mrs. Sidol's reckoning with you, I'm not gambling on her chances when she does," Bryce declared. Then, more seriously, "Has Jack mentioned his going West to you yet?"

"He said he was going to leave the East," Cid replied. "He has talked of trying the West several times—only a possibility, however. He is so interested in his work, and fancies there are big engineering problems in the mountain states. He doesn't wait long, once his mind is set. You remember how he jumped into the Canadian war service after his Commencement. You ought to."

"Yes, we jumped together. It was his quick and accurate mind helped him to jump from the clouds, so to speak, out of a burning hell hundreds of feet above the earth. He carries the scars still, but he made it." Bryce spoke affectionately.

"The West is big. Just where is Jack going from Colorado?" Cid asked.

"To the Coast, he says; and what these wooing New England hills have failed to do for him the big, silent Rockies and the still, gray desert may accomplish. I'll do my best for him, Cid. He's

dearer to me than any other living man," Bryce said, fervently.

Cid sat silent for a while, gazing out at the fair landscape until the anxieties of the hour seemed lifted from her, as something of its peace entered her soul, and she was herself again. The laughter and shouts beyond the bowlders had ceased, and she knew it was the crucial hour for the two so dear to her. When she spoke again the troubled look was gone from her eyes and her face was calm and full of assurance.

"Leslie is giving her time, her money, her strength, her whole interest to her study of homes and their needs. It is the result of her strenuous service in France. She cannot let go of it, somehow. She went away a sweet girl. She has come back a splendid woman. But, frankly, she isn't really giving her whole self, though—not her real self, I mean—but she doesn't know that yet. She said last night that she means to leave this place and the city when opportunity opens the way. She doesn't want to be a provincial in her own country while she knows much of another continent. She is the soul of patriotism and devoted to the task of making the best America possible, so she wants to study it more. It is her service of peace. America isn't so big, is it, but that, after all, these two may find each other somewhere in it? If it is right for them, the way will open. I have an abundant waiting capacity. I think our work,

yours and mine, for these two is really just begun."

Cid looked most like her cousin Jack when she smiled, and just now her smile was radiant. The man beside her turned away for a moment. Self-control is an essential in the law. When he spoke again he was the true attorney.

"We'll consider this partnership is not dissolved when I go back to Denver. It will mean much for —Jack, I am sure, and a very pleasant association for me—very pleasant, indeed. I'll keep you fully informed, and I'll trust you to help me with the details on conditions here. Have you given me all I need to know now?" The query was direct and penetrating.

"No, I haven't," Cid declared. "While Leslie's work is her absorbing interest, and her heart seems really indifferent, even cold, in personal affairs, there's a gnawing force back of all this, not fully shown yet. She believes, on the best of testimony, that John Fairborough Lorton is untrue, unworthy, that he led a double life in France. I believe now that what she heard there brought her home months before she had intended to come. I believe that all she heard over there came to her from the very people who are friends of my new tenant, Mrs. Sidol. I believe Leslie came home still loving Jack, and believing in him, and hoping that he would clear up everything. But something—trifles become mountains sometimes—keeps them

from coming to an understanding; partly circumstance, partly pride, partly different views of life, and partly a difference in dispositions that, once harmonized, ought to play in tune forever, each the complement of the other. But Leslie thinks that Jack is still doing in New York City what she thinks he did in France—making love to more than one woman, willingly helping to break up homes by trifling flirtations with other men's wives, while she is trying to build up homes. Leslie is Puritan clear through. All her inheritance and her training have made her clear-minded and determined. I may be 'too proud to fight' for Jack. He belongs to me and I am sure of him. But that's the other phase of all this tangle, and I will not keep it from you."

Bryce Carroday had leaped up at Cid's mention of married flirtations; his blue eyes blazed, and his voice fairly exploded with feeling. But when Bryce was angry he never shouted.

"I knew it. I tell you it's all the doing of one woman, and the devil himself can't undo her work. But you may safely trust that boy. Don't doubt him a minute. . . . Well, this is interesting," he added, more calmly, sitting down on the rock beside Cid again. "I came to New York almost purposeless, except for my profession. I'm leaving it full of determination and enthusiasm in a new line for me. Jack was dead to me when I came East. Do you suppose that I, who daily mourned

for him, I, who daily saw that white cross on the field of France, will let him suffer one line of disgrace now he is living? Not so long as I have an atom of humanity left in me. It makes life worth living to do something for other folks. You know that."

The man's face was bright with the determination to win. For the first time since the day when he knew that the girl of his first love was lost to him did his strength and purpose seem sweet to him.

"Leslie says the same of her work, that it makes life worth while. And who knows how big a victory it may be for her? We'll see what unfolds. I'm glad Jack is leaving the East now. Only, I hope it's a journey and not a real good-by to New England and New York. He belongs here. He knows that. And when a man knows where he belongs, he ought to stay there and grow bigger, and make the place bigger because he is there." Cid drew a deep breath. "Look at the landscape now. It's the hour of benediction on the Connecticut. It reminds me of Whittier's line:

> 'Drop thy still dews of quietness, till
> all our strivings cease.'"

Standing on the top of Gray Cliff, the two watched the sun drop behind the westward wall of the valley. It had been a good day for them. In the busy days to come they knew they would look back to this wonderful Sabbath, its homelike

comforts and restfulness, and the inspiration of nature's best gifts to him who seeks them in the Maytime, in the heart of New England.

Meanwhile the setting sun that symbolized beauty and peace to the two who were not lovers flamed angry fire and burned down into dull blue-black twilight for the two who might have been lovers.

As they left the spring Leslie said: "Let's go back to our guests now, Jack. We mustn't forget we are hosts."

"Please, Leslie, not just yet," Jack insisted. "Let's sit down up here just a little while where we can see the sunset. I must say a word to you. I'm leaving New York City soon and I may not see you again for a long time."

They sat down on the rocks. At their feet the little spring bubbled out of its crevice and tumbled down among the ferns, as if sure of its way to the big beautiful Connecticut off to the westward. The lowing of home-bound cows and the flight of home-winging birds, the changing tints of sky and landscape, all the sights and sounds of the hour before twilight, were there for these two who saw not any of them.

Leslie's heart turned to a leaden weight within her. She did not realize until that moment how ready she had been to clear Jack of all the counts against him, how willing to believe him on his own testimony, if he would but prove himself. On

that Sabbath in his senior year in college he had left her here with a new sweet happiness in her heart. But now—

Mrs. Sidol was telling the truth when she had said that her infatuated friend was going to leave the East "all for her sweet sake." Leslie had doubted it, refused to believe it, knew it could never be true. The memory of the moment was poignantly bitter.

"Why do you go?" The girl's tone was coldly indifferent to hide her deep hurt. Jack shivered at it.

"Why don't you say where am I going?"

Jack put the question gently, but the pain in his voice was so evident to the girl beside him, it seemed to her that somewhere in "the years between" he had acquired great skill in acting a part. Leslie was thankful afterward for the power that gave her command of her feelings.

"I don't ask because I don't care. We may as well be frank about this, Jack; there is no reason why I should care now. Your life and mine can never be the same. Your ideals, your social standards, your estimate of character, and mine are all far apart. Why should I ask? The sooner we accept the situation the happier we shall be." Leslie's voice was kind and calm, with the control born of deep experience.

"Then you would not care for my reason for going," Jack replied, with an equal calmness

born of the suppression of intense feeling. "But I want to say one thing before we leave here. I have thought some unkind things about your work because I selfishly wanted your whole mind. I was narrow and little. I see it now and I am big enough to be ashamed of it. For I am ashamed of myself for it, for my old-fashioned littleness, and I am proud of you. I never knew how proud till last night. It came as a revelation to me in that trial when you were on the witness stand. You are going to do wonderful things and you will be happy and blessed in the doing. I look down the years and see your name gathering fame as a humanitarian. And the cleanliness and safety and happiness that you will put into many homes, that will multiply into many more homes, as generations follow one another, will crown your beautiful head with a halo of glory. Even if that dear place down there does go to tenants and strangers, many, many children will rise up and call you blessed. As for myself, there was a blue star on a white flag in a window of my father's house when I went to France. Its legend ran, '*Out of this home has gone a son into the service of his country.*' I have no father nor mother nor window now. But if I had, truly it is my purpose to do my work so that in that window there might hang, not now the service flag of war, but the invisible flag of peace, with its invisible legend, '*Out of this home has gone a son into a larger*

service of his country in its day of peace; not only to die for it, but to live for it.' Leslie, you are dearer to me at this moment when I know you are lost to me than you ever were before in all the years I have loved you. But if it cannot be, this thing I want—you and our home and New England—then, as I have lived so I will keep on living, unafraid and unashamed, because, God helping me, my life shall be clean and my work true."

He was a handsome man, but now, all his words coming under the inspiration of this intense moment, in the strength of his overcoming and the splendor of his purpose, he stood up a very prince before the girl he loved.

Leslie Jannison's duties under the Red Cross service had made known to her many of life's most poignant sorrows Youth and strength and trust in God had lifted her away from the sharpness of them, while she had freely given her helping hands and loving sympathy, or abided patiently when neither help nor sympathy availed. But all this was for others, not for herself.

To-day she was thrilled to the depths of her being as she listened to the sound of Jack Lorton's voice and felt the full import of the manliness implied behind the words. And this man, the only man she could ever love, the ideal of all her girlhood dreams, the pride of all her hero-worshiping young-womanhood—so big, so strong, so

brave in war, so able and successful in peace—this lover of beauty, this dreamer of dreams, artist in whatever his hand created—this man was leaving New York City and New England and his work, a career big with professional promise, all because of a blind infatuation for another man's wife. A thing endowed with exquisite loveliness to look upon, but, within, a grinning skeleton, cold and bare of all that endows with the warm, pulsing sweetness and joy and reality of Life. For "her sweet sake" Jack was giving up New York and his work there, and the girl he had known all her life here in the Connecticut Valley. The girl he must have loved in those far-away college days. In that hour Leslie Jannison walked alone in her Gethsemane and drank her cup of bitter grief to the dregs. And nobody, not even Cid, who so loved to help her fellow men in their hour of need, could help her.

"Good-by, Leslie. I'll not trouble you nor embarrass you. Let's go now and find our guests."

Jack stooped and kissed the girl's hand lying on the shelving rock, then courteously lifted her up, and the two, "fur together," as Jimmie down in the graveyard had said, started on their separate ways, with only their feet in the common path along the crest of Gray Cliff.

XI

BURNING THE BRIDGES, BUT LEAVING THE BRIDGE SITES

JACK LORTON did not burn all his bridges behind him when he left New York City. At least he did not, as he had phrased it, destroy all the bridge sites. From a business point of view the way lay wide open for his return to the East whenever he chose to come. Nor was there about him any suggestion of the lovelorn swain ready to take the mad plunge of a disappointed man toward the land of forgetfulness. Jack knew exactly what he was leaving, and how he was leaving it, as he knew where he was going and what he expected to do there. The impulsiveness of the dreamer never outweighed the accuracy of the mathematician within him. He spent two weeks upstate, finishing the bridge and road matter in the St. Lawrence country. Another week in closing his New York office and arranging the details of his New England holdings, that Cid's business cares might be lightened as much as possible. And he put in no little time in securing a

suitable position for his office help, Janis Gwin. No small task, either, for Janis was not an easily adjustable piece of office furniture. There was need of adaptation on both sides with her. But in all this time there was a swift, steady pushing toward his objective that nothing stayed nor turned aside.

Meanwhile Bryce Carroday found more to be looked after in these days of waiting for Jack to get ready to go with him, than in all the time before that he had spent in the East. In the late afternoon of the day before he was to leave for the West he went to the offices of Grace & Grace to bid good-by to his associates. He was met in the outer room by Janis Gwin.

"The firm's havin' a consultation on some very important matter in the senior's private office, Mr. Carroday," Janis explained. "Gladys is in there, takin' testimony or something, and I'm helpin' her this afternoon to get some work done out here. Mr. Lorton's rooms are closed now, you know. No, don't go away," as Bryce was turning toward the door. "There's a lady in there, I mean young Mr. Grace's office, waitin' to see you a long while. Gladys said to tell you if you came in."

Janis gave a quick flirt of her red head as she directed the young lawyer to the private office of the junior member of the firm of Grace & Grace.

At his entrance a woman rose to meet him.

She had been there for some time before Janis came in, and the girl, who hadn't seen her until now, caught only a brief glance before the door closed between her and Bryce's caller and himself.

"Golly!" Janis ejaculated, with a puzzled frown. "Now who in all Jerusalem is she? And what's she want of him, of all men in New York City? Tall and slim and plain and not young, relic of some deceased husband, maybe, who wants advice how not to fill the last wishes of the dear departed and keep inside the law. I've got to run her down—but no hurry about it. That kind hangs on and reappears. Anyhow, she's no vampire and he's no man-eatin' shark. They won't do each other any harm. That kind of women's too common to be real interestin', anyhow."

The girl's back was toward the door of the private office when Bryce and his caller came out. She did not turn her head as the two passed through the room, talking earnestly, but no word of their conversation escaped her sharp ears. Like all other information, it was tabulated and laid away in her mental files to be produced when called for.

On the evening of the same day Jack Lorton and Cid were sitting out on Cid's little balcony, watching the city's twinkling lights. The evening breeze was sweeping in pleasantly, and the full moon, with which the big city has little concern,

seemed to be shining down on these two alone. To-morrow Jack would be leaving for Colorado, first, and Space afterward.

"Do you know, Cid," Jack said, "that one thing about my work here that I shall miss most is that little red-headed girl, Janis. She's the top of impudence, sometimes, and her curiosity is almost criminal, but I didn't know just how much I did depend on her till I'm leaving. She's too capable to be idle, and too trying to keep a place long. That's what troubles me. I don't want anybody to be hard on her."

"That's because of your good, chivalric heart, Jack," Cid declared. "Not many employers would put up with little Gwin."

"That's because they don't know her, then," Jack replied. "She supports herself, and her husband mainly, and her crippled old father. I helped her some about the time her mother died. She was an angel to that old lady. 'Peter Rabbit,' as she calls her husband, isn't able to do much—ought to be out of doors in the country somewhere—but Janis clings to him; and the only work she knows is in an office. Won't you look after her a bit, Cid, even if you don't like her, and let me know how she gets along? Down under her steel-plated hide is a little heart of pure gold."

"I'll do it for you, Jack Sprat, but somehow I doubt that heart-of-gold proposition. I see too much of the world for that," Cid replied.

"Well, you won't some day, when she turns the trick for you the minute you least think of it. Just be good to her for my sake," Jack petitioned.

"I'll be good to anybody you say," Cid promised.

"Then, Ciddie, old darling, be very good to that cousin of yours. The one with the big brown eyes. You needn't tell her where I'm going unless she asks you. She doesn't care."

There was a choking in the young man's voice, and for a minute the two were silent. Jack had not referred to Leslie in any way since the Sabbath on Gray Cliff.

"The one with the heart of pure gold down under a tenacious covering," Cid said, softly. "She's as dear to me as you are. Keep a brave heart of your own under your armor-plated outsides, while you are in the big West, Jack, and remember, what's best for us will come to us at last. What we want and ought not have we can learn to do without and be happy. I know."

"And I know who's got the best heart of all. It's Cindereller. It's worth a million in government securities just to know her. There is no measuring what it means to be her own cousin. Say, Cid, do you know, that day we were up at Leslie's"—no choking of the voice now—"when I saw you and Bryce Carroday together, I wondered why the-dickens-and-tom-walker he couldn't

have met you instead of his girl, a sweet little kitten type, who, evidently, didn't think mourning was becoming to her, she put it away in such a hurry—and why you, who told me one afternoon here just a mere nibble of your affairs—why you couldn't have met him first—if you like him. Do you?"

"Very," Cid replied, with a laugh. "He's so comfortable."

"Oh, there's no romance in comfort," Jack insisted.

"No, maybe not, but it has some staying qualities, and when you are thirty—"

"You just stop there until we all catch up with you. Nay, moreover, you stay there. You'll never be 'forty, fat, and fair to look upon.' You'll always be thirty, sweet, and worth your weight in gold. But I must be going now. Bryce is coming around to tell you good-by to-night. I'll see him to-morrow, and, oh, on endless days ahead, when we can really visit. It's still like a dream—his being alive and with me again. Good-by. If I can get away I'll run in to-morrow forenoon, for the last fond embrace. Good-by."

Jack gave his cousin an affectionate hug and was gone. He did not get in the next day and Cid did not see him again before he left the city.

In the entry at the street door there was a comfortable seat where one might sit who had a moment of waiting. As Jack stepped from the

elevator into the hall, Mrs. Sidol rose from this seat and faced him.

"You are leaving the East soon, I hear. You must not go without saying good-by, Jack," she said, softly. "General Sidol just went out for the evening. I came down to the door with him. That's how I happened to be here. Sit down a minute. There's no telling when I'll see you again."

The woman's composure and kindliness were perfect. Evidently she had no mind to make Jack uncomfortable over his refusal to take up her cause with Bryce Carroday—and anyone who keeps a man from feeling uncomfortable has her battle half won. Jack, expecting her greeting to be a blow, had received a caress. He sat down beside her. There was nothing else, in courtesy, for him to do.

"I'm really not grieving over your going," Mrs. Sidol said, sweetly. "You never will get so far that I shall not see you again. You don't know what it means to me to have you for a friend, you splendid big fellow."

"Am I that easy?" Jack broke in, smiling.

Mrs. Sidol could do many things successfully; among them was none better in the doing than the daring coquette act, combined with a baby-eyed innocence that kept one guessing whether disregard of law or unconsciousness of its existence prevailed in her mind.

"Oh, I really do mean it. Many a girl would say it to you if she could. Your friend, Miss Leslie Jannison, for instance. But I, being married, can get behind General Sidol and say just what I think."

"Evidently," Jack said, dryly.

Mrs. Sidol chose to ignore the remark.

"What I want to say now is this: First, I do expect to see you again, and sooner than you think; and secondly, when I do you will be glad to see me, maybe a little bit more than you are right now, you careless boy." There was a pretty coquettishness in the manner again. "And, thirdly, I am so sorry the children acted so horribly the other night. They just spoiled everything for me, as they must have for you. But the real thirdly is that at last I am going to be relieved. Their father was a naval officer, you know. His sister had the children much of the time, even before his death, as well as since. She manages all his estate and looks after their income. It saves me such a lot of time and bother, too. Well, the plans are on foot for them to be with their aunt at least half of every year. And maybe—I'm hoping—maybe this sister will adopt them entirely pretty soon. When they are bigger and not so much trouble I'll love them, of course, for they *are* handsome. But now it's *such* a relief."

Their mother was handsome, marvelously so, and never more daintily beautiful than at this

moment as she discoursed in a soft voice of her escape from the care of her children. One could almost forget her words in the pleasure of looking at that exquisite face. Jack Lorton was tremendously human, and he knew afterward why the picture of the drawn, tired face of the plaintiff mother in the automobile trial came to him just here, and why her words sounded in his ears: "No amount of money will ever bring back my little girl to me. You can't pay for them things with money." The face and the words came as a barrier between him and the allurement of the beauty of the moment.

Jack rose to his feet, but his companion sat still.

"The fourth and last reason why I asked you to stop a minute was to say good-by to you."

Just then a gentleman entered the hall and, stepping into the elevator, asked for the ninth floor. His back was toward the two, but Jack recognized Bryce Carroday. At sight of him the light faded from Mrs. Sidol's deep-blue eyes, leaving them only cold steel in a white face.

"That's Bryce Carroday's death warrant," Jack thought. "She can coo sweetly around a lot of us men, but it's the real thing with him, and I don't wonder. If I were a woman he's the kind of man I'd love to madness—unless I was a 'Little Colorado' type. I'll settle this thing with him as soon as we get away to-morrow and have it

over with. Bryce mustn't be caught in her net. Ordinarily he would not need anybody's help, and he's never easy handling in these things, but —I know the lady here."

As he stooped to offer his hand in good-by, Bryce, on the elevator, caught sight of him.

"I'll not wait a minute after we leave town to-morrow," he thought. "I'll have it out with Jack by the time we get to the High Bridge. Once he knows what I know he'll see it as I see it. The boy's all right, only a bit too good, and to him all women are angels. What are women for, anyway?"

Half an hour later when he came down the same elevator he wasn't asking any questions. He wasn't even thinking of Mrs. Sidol. He was thinking of Cid Jannison and wondering at his good fortune in having met her.

Neither did he "have it out with Jack" before the train reached the High Bridge, going up the Hudson Valley the next day. Nor did Jack Lorton "settle the thing immediately."

New York City is inexorable in its demands on time and energy. Allowing only twenty-four hours to the day and night, it insists on crowding in the events of thirty-six hours daily.

For the first time since the two men had found each other again they gave themselves up to the enjoyment of an unhurried, uninterrupted renewal of friendship. For the first time, too, since

their mutual resurrection from the dead, they talked long of battlefield days, of comrades now in civil life and comrades now only a memory. Of their own narrow escapes and of the thrilling scenes they had witnessed. Things that soldiers speak of only to soldiers, knowing that only soldiers can understand. Then the business outlook of the West, with the making of plans, engrossed them.

The third day of the journey found these two self-appointed guardians of each other's safety devoted and confidential in other matters, but alert, defensive, and noncommittal on one theme.

The train had left Chicago some hundreds of miles to the eastward and was swinging into the heart of the Middle West, where the wind-rippled grain of the great Kansas wheat belt flowed away to the edge of the universe; to the eye, a vast green level, unbroken by a stream, beneath a vast blue dome unscarred by cloud.

"It's like the ocean I didn't go down in, that sea of wheat out there," Bryce said, turning from the window. "By this time to-morrow we'll be in Denver and hard at work. But it's always a rest to cross the wheat belt. You don't need to watch out, nor peer down, nor crane your neck looking up. All that's to be seen is on the level—the wide open prairie—with God Almighty up there watching over it and you and me. There won't be much time for looking anywhere, for

me, after to-day, I'm afraid. I spent too much of it back East. But it was worth it. It was worth it."

The repetition was emphatic.

Jack made no reply. He was thinking of New England and its little farms that would be swallowed whole in one of these Kansas wheat fields. But still he must always dream of them. The prairies brought no rest to him.

"Let's get down to brass tacks now, Jack. Do you know what I'm hoping for from your work out here for us?" Bryce was taking up the real business of the hour at last.

Jack did not turn his eyes from the window as he replied: "No, I don't know what you are hoping for. I know, though, just what you are expecting and what you'll get—the exact returns of the findings of my instruments, no more, no less. I can fight for the flag, and lie to a woman if it's necessary to make her happy; but I can't resist the call of a little child nor ignore the measurements of my tools. Go ahead. What's your hope, Beloved?"

"Let's review the lesson of the previous day first," Bryce began. "You remember I told you our case has to do with the settlement of a title to some mining property between uncle and nephew. This property, lying next to a claim owned by an estate held for some minor heirs, was the inheritance of twin brothers. Their father

was an old prospector who died one night in a lonely cabin in a gulch up in the mountains, alone, except for an Indian servant, who buried him up there and brought his effects supposedly down to the settlement, and then disappeared. The inherited claim, neglected and overlooked for a time, seems to have been somewhat carelessly divided between the two sons. One of them is dead now. His son, the said nephew, and the living brother had no trouble, even after the property developed some value. For the uncle was rich without it, and fond of his nephew—a ranchman down near the New Mexican border—and peace and amity might have reigned perpetually. But just here something happened. It was a pretty girl. The uncle—I never stood for him, but I am the junior member of the firm—although forty years old, or maybe older, conceives a mad infatuation for this girl, who was quite some years younger than himself. She wasn't much interested in him and didn't take him seriously, although he is a courtly fellow. But, having been bereft just then of a sweetheart who was supposed to be at the bottom of the Atlantic, maybe he helped her for a time to forget. If he didn't, his nephew did. I don't know the workings of the feminine mind as well as I imagined I did once. Meantime, by the genius only women have, another woman breaks into the game—and, well, the girl is informed that this

uncle man, her admirer, is really an undivorced married man and impossible. There was a wedding soon, however, but it was between the nephew and the girl—my one-time 'Little Colorado.' She got a good man, however. I have known him for several years, as I have already told you. He's always said he trusted me above all other men, so he evidently thought I had good judgment in choosing this girl. Just then the uncle finds his wife is dead, very dead; and in the rebound, and again by the genius only women have, he finds himself married again—to the woman who helped his nephew to secure the pretty girl. An explosion follows; for uncle learns through wife Number Two that Number One had really been dead for some months and that he had been a free man to marry, if he had but known it, when his nephew won the girl from him. So he turns against his nephew and goes to the law and demands a division of the hitherto undivided mining property. The boundary lines, not clearly set forth as yet, seem to put the wealth all on the uncle's side. If they are true, the nephew and wife will be left penniless. His ranch is mortgaged to the breaking point and he has no other income. Our firm holds that the uncle's claim is incontestable according to the old prospector's will and the boundaries. I dissented, and am having the lines established beyond question at my own expense. If the lines are accurate as claimed now, then I am

party to taking all the property from that young man who trusts me, and his wife, whom I once cared everything for—and their twin babies. I have been told the uncle is devil enough to think that if he wins he can take the nephew's wife away from him yet. At least he hopes to break up that household. He's so sure of winning, too, that he has his papers already to petition for a divorce from the woman who married him not so very long ago. I don't believe he can break up this home, but he'll try it if he gets the rich half of the property. That's the undertow of society the law can't reach. The man sent out from New York City to help us settle things with a chart and compass wasn't getting anywhere—with his surveying, I mean. He was doing a pile of other mischief, however. You are to tell us exactly where the boundary lines should run. I expect you to tell the truth—but I *hope* you will find for the defendant, our client's opponent. If you find we are right, we win. But if we do I resign from the firm. I'm a lawyer and I am losing heavily to do it. But, Jack Lorton, I couldn't look my mirror in the face again if I knew myself a party to bringing poverty, sorrow, temptation to the girl who once wore a ring for my sake. She will overcome them all, I know, and she is, frankly, only a memory to me, yet if she were not"—Bryce looked straight into Jack Lorton's eyes—"I told you once before I'm not the particular kind of

fool that finds any pleasure in the exclusive company of other men's wives. But for old sake's sake, and because the girl I once cared for is a wife and mother, I cannot throw one line of shadow across her path. Poor legal business, I know, but it makes a fellow feel confoundedly big and independent and on good terms with himself. There aren't too many homes left us, anyhow, these days. When I go to smashing hearthstones for a fee, may my—ship go down with all souls on board. . . . Look at that wheat. It 'll be ready to cut in ten days. When that Bible man said that thing about 'the blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich,' he must have had these Kansas prairies in mind. Nothing much for a man to do after the wheat sowing's done but to sit around and let the blessings patter down on his head."

Jack Lorton was not looking at the wheat fields. What Bryce Carroday had said was running through his mind, and Jack's mind always worked swiftly. Bryce had told him the main features of this case on the day of their first meeting in Cid Jannison's room. The second telling had enlarged on the first, and he understood it better now. Neither telling, however, had included any names. The first time for professional reasons, and the second for personal, but Jack knew nothing of that. In fact, he hadn't thought of names at all as yet. Lines, and not names, were his business interests.

"Why need anybody be uneasy about as splendid a type of manhood as Bryce? I'll drop *that* matter here," Jack concluded as he reflected on what he had just listened to. But the recollection of the evening in Mrs. Sidol's room came insistently. The tearful pleading with Jack for Bryce to use his influence with the New York firm to stop the divorce proceedings—with all the pathetic reasons for their being stopped—"loss of property, broken homes, children disgraced,—oh, everything," and then there flashed up in Jack's keenly retentive mind the real power that Bryce Carroday was supposed to hold.

"Your friend Bryce is in the firm that is interested in helping to save an estate for the Sidol family. If he makes it clear to the firm here that this will interfere with that, as it will, they will persuade the general to let the matter stand at least for the present."

Might it be that Estelle most wanted a stay of proceedings in order to get a slice of that same Sidol estate? Might the general be seeking the divorce now in order not to divide with her? What were broken homes and disgraced children to a woman of Mrs. Sidol's type? But that she held the winning card in the whole game Jack had not a doubt. Opposite him sat a man big enough to renounce large professional and business interests for the sake of a moral principle. Between such a man and the type whom Estelle

Sidol could hold enslaved was the distance of star from star. And yet the two types walk in and out on the same street, climb the same stairway, eat at the same table, dance with the same girl.

"I believe I am sure of one or two things, anyhow," Jack concluded. "First, we're a long way from New York and Bryce is a twenty-four-carat man, anywhere. I needn't worry about the vampire's grip on him right now. And, secondly, I am dead sure now about that divorce. All that 'horribly jealous business' is so much capital for both the general and the general's general. One uses it to get rid of the other; one, to keep a hold on the other. That is, the general plays jealous in order to have an excuse for divorce; the lady plays him jealous in order to prevent the divorcing of an abused, misunderstood, beautiful little wife. I wonder how many men she ever lured on the rocks through pity of her sad fate, the pretty, stone-hearted siren. But could the Sidol estate, that Estelle told me about, possibly be the one that Bryce is telling me of here? I supposed it was some property in New York or New Jersey, or somewhere about—if I thought of it at all. But it may be out West for all I know. By Jove! he hasn't mentioned any names yet. Well, John F. Lorton, it's your business to do a C.E.'s work, and wait. What Bryce wants you to know he will tell you. But what will Estelle do to Leslie?"

The same long miles that so willingly separated him from all these sordid intrigues and flatteries stretched in weary lengths between him and Leslie. She wasn't "just a memory" to him—yet. Could he ever think of her as calmly as Bryce had learned to think of "Little Colorado"? Then came the picture of Cid Jannison as she had looked up at him on the night he told her good-by. And her words, "what we ought not have we can learn to do without," brought balm to his soul, and his face brightened involuntarily.

"What's on your mind, boy?" Bryce Carroday asked, as he noted this change of countenance.

"I was thinking of Cid and her parting salute. Say, Bryce, when there weren't mothers enough to go around, the Lord made big-hearted, clear-sighted women like my cousin Cid Jannison, and, take it from me, they help a lot."

"Amen!" Bryce responded.

XII

WHEN GREEK MEETS TURK

LESLIE JANNISON did not see Jack Lorton after the Sabbath evening following their interview on Gray Cliff. Having made up her mind definitely to go her own way, she told herself, once for all, that for herself there was nothing more to think of now except her few duties at the homestead. Beyond lay her larger opportunities in the city. And the insistent call within her urged her to study and serve her country in its crises of peace, as vital to its life as the crises of war had been. For her, America had ceased to be a vast "melting pot" wherein all foreigners must be fused into good Anglo-Saxon molds. In her vision lay a new America, losing not one ideal that had made its Declaration of Independence glorious, its Constitution a bulwark. But combining with this the national, artistic, intellectual, and spiritual elements of those whose lives and fortunes are fused into this new America of the mid-twentieth century. To this all intelligent forces must blend and all patriotic Americans, among whom Leslie

hoped to be ranked, must give themselves in study and service, according to their gifts and opportunities. A slacker in peace was to her no less contemptible than a slacker in war. But, unfortunately, one's thoughts do not always obey —as to forgetting. The battle supposed to have been finished on Gray Cliff was only begun, a daily encounter that left her, at nightfall, sometimes victor and sometimes vanquished. Dawn, however, always found her brave for her new day's work. And the giving of herself to helping others brought its sure blessing. It brought more— an enlarged sympathy. The need for a better mothering of neglected children awakened in her a new conception of a mother's place in the economy of building a better citizenship for a bigger America. The larger view came so gradually, however, that Leslie herself did not realize, until long after she was an established welfare worker, that she might once have been narrow and analytic and, by contrast, seemingly heartless. That she could ever have been narrow and analytic and heartless none of her friends would have believed. Only her cousin, Cid Jannison, who knew her best and loved her most, saw the unfolding character with unfolding opportunity. And Leslie was a tireless worker. The fine physique that enabled her to go through the agonizing strain of the Red Cross service, that sturdy New England heritage of a temperate life, with a wholesome

childhood in the Connecticut Valley, counted mightily in the vigorous campaign of days—in the city tenements, fighting disease, evil habits, poverty, and parental influence that make up a future citizenship of defective minds, undeveloped bodies, and Godless souls.

Leslie's greatest lesson in this came from Cid, who first convinced her of the needs of those above the slum—the middle grade, alert, averaging well, needing, above everything else, *opportunity*. It was Cid who showed her how the slum is fed not more from other slums than from those struggling ones of higher grade, who, given the right support at the right time, would walk erect, above the groveling submerged group.

On the evening after Jack Lorton and Bryce Carroday left New York Leslie came down to the city for a visit with her cousin, with whom she always took council.

"The greatest menace to welfare, Leslie, is the worker of the one-track mind. If you are going to be useful, don't begin by idol worship," Cid said, as they chatted over plans after dinner.

"No?" Leslie questioned.

"The young worker sees only one line of needs, meets only one class, feels only one kind of impulse. It may be foreign missions, home missions, orphans, aged, defectives. But the most useful folks are the all-round leaders who have tenacity to a single purpose, but who measure it in terms

of the whole purpose. There are those who wouldn't give a cent to help a boy working his way through college, who make a specialty of cripples; those who build better jails, and resent an increased tax for universities. The particular choice of service is a personal matter, but it is best understood in its relation to the whole system of service, of which it is only a part. If we are really going to Americanize, we need to know America, its geography, its people, its history, and its ideals, before we can *be* a unit in the national life, or ask our immigrant fellow man to become one. What was that Jungle rhyme of Kipling's?—

> "As the creeper that girdles the tree trunk,
> So the law runneth forward and back,
> For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf,
> And the strength of the Wolf is the Pack.

To do good one must be big, and to be big one must be good. Listen to the gospel according to Cid."

"You are wonderful, Cid," Leslie said, affectionately.

"That's because I am a Jannison, then—and maybe because I am also a Lorton," Cid declared. Then, as Leslie's face grew stern, she continued: "We'll come to think alike on that some day. Just now we are all for saving Greater New York for Greater America. And you and I will do our share."

"Oh, Cid, I am not caring for Greater New York specifically; it is just to do my day's work wherever my place may be," Leslie said.

It had been a hard day for her, and somehow the home valley had never seemed so dear as it did when she left it for the city that afternoon. And every turn of the way, every glimpse of the river, the farmhouse, with Gray Cliff looming like a protecting rampart beyond it, when she turned to wave good-by to Aunt Rettie Nevins—everything had reminded her of Jack Lorton, who was so much a part of it all. Jack must be leaving Chicago for the big, vague West at this very time. So big and vague this West appeared that whatever went into it seemed to vanish from her forever. But his face had been before her all day, and his words were sounding in her ears, "Leslie, you are dearer to me at this moment, when I know you are lost to me forever, than you have ever been before in all the years I have loved you." And Cid never looked so much a Lorton as she did to-night, with Jack's smile and Jack's gray eyes and black brows. The temptation to fall into her arms and have a good cry was growing every minute.

Just here Ellis, the serving man, announced, "Lady to see you, Miss Jannison," and with the words Mrs. Sidol entered, bringing with her the invisible pervasion of her beauty, her friendliness, her smile, her soft voice, her graceful carriage.

"How fortunate to find you both!" she exclaimed. "I came on a business matter, but I meant to combine it with pleasure. Now it's a double pleasure."

She sat down with Cid's invitation. The rose-hued lamp shade had been exchanged for a rich yellow tone with soft green veiling. Mrs. Sidol's golden hair and soft yellow gown, with touches of pale green and violet, suggested, as Cid afterward declared, that she "had dressed for the lamp." But these things gave her power, and she knew it. Leslie, still in her gray street dress, with her rich coloring, seemed almost gaudy; while Cid, in white, with pale-blue ornaments, by contrast, grew colorless.

"Business first," Mrs. Sidol began. "We are just settled in this charming apartment, Miss Jannison, where we can have the children with us —and here—everything blows up and away. The children are leaving for the summer with their aunt, of course, and I was counting so much on getting useful, myself, with Miss Leslie, in welfare work. I need something of that kind as a stimulant. The city is so dull since the war. You remember we planned to work together and only needed a little time to get at it."

Cid looked at Leslie, who was looking at the lamp shade. Mrs. Sidol ignored both as she continued:

"Now everything changes. General Sidol is

leaving soon and insists on my going with him. If you had a husband, Miss Jannison, you would understand, I'm sure."

Mrs. Sidol judged Cid Jannison to be a business woman, void of sentiment. And business was Estelle Sidol's strong point—with sentiment. She had prided herself on the skill with which she had secured an income for her two sons from their father's estate, although she herself forfeited all her own income therefrom by her second marriage. True, she forfeited very little, because the naval officer's property was much involved in poor investments. But it relieved her of the need of sharing any of her funds with his two children.

The woman's voice was velvety, but forceful, as she continued:

"I want to give up my lease, Miss Jannison, and I must have the very best terms possible, too, for I haven't had the apartment long and have no prospect of ever wanting it again. You see, this is really a place for families, and now, at last, thank goodness, I'm free of much more trouble for the next few years and can have a glorious time."

Cid and Leslie looked interrogations.

"My sister-in-law, Miss Jane Kilwarth, has decided to take the responsibility of the children's education from now till they are through college. In reality, she has legally adopted them. She was a teacher, herself, once, and so refined. They

spend their summers with her, anyhow. It is a splendid arrangement. They will be hers until they are eighteen. By that time they will be well trained and really companionable for me. So General Sidol and I will not bother with apartments again. What are your terms for relieving me of this lease, Miss Jannison? Be lenient."

All so softly and smilingly said, under the soft golden glow of the big lamp.

"I'll cancel the lease to-night, if you wish," Cid replied, calmly. "I can fill the apartment to-morrow. My waiting list is the most impatient force in my business affairs."

"And not require any bonus, or whatever you call it? Why! why! You make me gasp!" Mrs. Sidol responded, in mock amazement.

When Cid left the room to get the leases and was safely out of hearing, she added, "We are leaving for Colorado soon."

"Colorado!" Leslie exclaimed, involuntarily, the rose hue flushing her cheeks suddenly, then ebbing away, leaving them very white.

"You recall that evening when you dined with me, and— Well, we, you and I, understand each other. But you remember it was all in confidence—what I told you then, and I know you are the soul of honor."

Mrs. Sidol said this in a low voice as she looked at Leslie with a meaning smile. She knew well

what the soul of honor meant to a girl of Leslie Jannison's heritage and training.

"I've so much to tell you," she went on, sweetly. "I have just had such wonderful letters from France. I would have brought them up if I had known you were here. I want you to see them. Do come down to Number Seven as early as you can, for I'll be leaving town soon. I've been so happy here, too, thinking how free I'd be, now that—well, you remember the threat of somebody to go away from New York. I understand he made good and is really gone. Poor, infatuated fellow! He told me good-by two nights ago here, in a burst of emotion."

Just then Cid came in with the lease papers, and Mrs. Sidol, feeling that she had nothing more to fear from Leslie, whom she had trapped, bound, and gagged, turned away from her, as a cat turns away for a little rest from a crushed but living mouse. The shrewdest of minds, however, has some weak spot. Estelle Sidol's weakness was that she had left Cid Jannison out of her reckoning.

"What lovely flowers, Miss Jannison! and—" Mrs. Sidol's eyes grew big and round with pleased surprise. "Why, where did you get that vase? It's a Parisian product. I know it. I've seen it before. Wasn't it your cousin's, that big, splendid, darling fellow I've seen with you so often lately? Did he *trust* it with *you?*" There was more to follow, but this would suffice now.

Then and there the real Estelle Sidol stood revealed to Leslie Jannison, who had estimated the woman's vanity and love of adulation from other men than her husband. She had not been measured yet for double dealing. To Leslie she had ridiculed Jack Lorton's "foolish infatuation." To Cid he was "a big, splendid, darling fellow," and this daringly expressed to Leslie's own face.

"And the vase?"

Mrs. Sidol was all a pink sweetness set in a soft golden glamour of lamplight and silken gown.

"The vase? Oh yes. That did belong to my cousin, Jack Lorton. He's a terrible tease. He was in here one day this spring helping me to fix up a bit for a dinner I was giving for his friend and mine, Mr. Bryce Carroday, and he accidentally dropped a really lovely bowl full of iris—Mr. Carroday's favorite flower, I think he said, that night. Well, anyway, Jack broke the bowl, and in much penitence sent me this vase to take its place. He said that he had brought it from France, but that he thought it was as ugly as sin and he always hated it. It was one of the things he hadn't ever cared enough for to even unwrap since he got back home. He sent it to me all packed up just as it was when he shipped it. When I told Bryce that night what Jack had said, he was delighted. He had seen one like it somewhere. Evidently it had no especially interesting association for either of the young men, but I don't think it is so bad,

do you? It is just an odd thing. I'm not keeping it for Jack's sake. He seemed to think it was so much junk thrust on him and he was glad to get rid of it."

The bolt shot home, though neither Cid nor Leslie dreamed that it was not so much on account of Jack Lorton's indifference, which Cid had purposely emphasized, but on account of Bryce's part in the matter, that made Mrs. Sidol's pink cheeks grow pale and dulled the sparkle of her blue eyes. In her eagerness to clinch her case with Leslie she had overlooked Cid. Suddenly, unexpectedly, she had met with a woman, a maiden lady, no doubt older than herself, and far less handsome, who carelessly claimed the friendship of the only man whom she truly and passionately adored. With one brief sentence this woman had revealed Jack Lorton's real attitude toward herself—Jack Lorton, of whose ultimate captivity to her charms she had had no doubt. And this had been done in Leslie Jannison's presence. But what was that to the daring assumption regarding Bryce? The stab of jealousy was the more anguishing because it was so unlooked for.

Mrs. Sidol's call was soon ended. In her rooms again, she clenched her fingers into knotted fists and raged with anger at the old maid and her putty-headed cousin. She had had no intention of leaving New York City. In a twinkling her plans were changed. She *would* go somewhere

now, and sooner or later, sooner than later, Cid Jannison would be where Leslie Jannison was now. The game wasn't ended yet. No game was ended till Estelle Sidol could claim a man's infatuation and a woman's jealousy as trophies of victory.

In their room that night the Jannison cousins knew that they were more than ever of one blood.

"If I live a thousand years, and grow happier every year, I'll never be any happier than I was while you turned that lovely vase into dust and ashes before that woman's eyes. Oh, Cid, you are so vicious-good when you want to be!" Leslie declared.

"I'm afraid I'm too vicious-good sometimes," Cid replied. "But I told the whole unvarnished, unglazed, truth about the vase."

Long after Leslie had gone to sleep her cousin sat beside her bed. As she looked at the sleeping girl she murmured, softly:

"So she's happiest when I'm defending Jack Lorton. Oh, Leslie, you know yourself; some day you will know Jack, too."

XIII

EXPERT FINDINGS

WHEN the two young travelers arrived in Denver Bryce Carroday at once presented John Fairborough Lorton of New York City to the senior members of his firm as a civil engineer who understood only the general outlines of the legal case, the relationship of the parties to it, and the junior member's wishes to have the matter further established by expert investigation, but was entirely unacquainted with the personnel, or even the names, of the parties to the suit. Bryce asked only that time be given for a thorough establishment of property-division lines, and upon the expert findings of this engineer the matter must rest definitely.

The senior members received the new engineer courteously, and dismissed Bryce Carroday with the assurance that time would be allowed for the expert findings, and that no step would be taken in the further progress of the suit until the report of such findings had been filed with the firm.

Left with the older men, the young engineer's further instructions were simple.

"This is a suit at law between an uncle and a nephew as to the exact division line between the holdings of two heirs to a mining claim in a locality where there are only a few properties now recorded. The claim adjoining this one was in litigation for some time, between an English syndicate and an administrator on an estate, and is now held by the English claimants, I understand. But none of the properties have been considered valuable until very recently, and, since that increase in value is not yet generally known and seems to be geologically limited, little interest obtains regarding any of the region up in that wild country. Knowing you are a friend of young Carroday's and that your interest would naturally be personal, we do not care for you to know anything further of the particulars of the suit. Your business is to establish a boundary line according to the instructions of the will of the former owner, now deceased, and the laws of Colorado, and to report such findings whenever you, yourself, with Mr. Carroday, shall have agreed on the proper time."

The speaker paused a moment, then continued:

"We deeply appreciate your friendly feeling in our case. It is a long way to come from New York City. That part counts with us. We can easily believe that Carroday's great desire to

settle this thing has led him personally to make it worth your while to come, and we are backing Carroday in this, of course. We are basing much on your work for our client's success, and can afford to wait on you. But none of us has time to burn. When can you be ready to begin?"

The speaker was a brusque, impersonal sort of man to whom law was also gospel. Jack looked at him and his associate with the quick-measuring eye of youth, then replied:

"Before I begin may I ask you to believe that civil engineering knows no lines of friendship or prejudice? Its business is to *measure*, not to *feel*. I shall return to you what I discover, no more, no less. I accept pay for my services only. I can begin to-day."

The law partners smiled approvingly. For, while the assurance argued nothing for the personal side of the matter, it brought a sense of reliance that counts for justice and commands respect in every line of human business.

Bryce and Jack did not see each other again after the day when they separated in the firm's office, until the young engineer had returned to the city with his work finished. In fact, all that Bryce did on the day that the two reached Denver was to present Jack to the firm as the new man chosen for the work at the mines, and then to leave Colorado on the next train for the Southwest.

On the morning of that day, having just arrived

from the East, Bryce had left his companion in the waiting room of the railway station while he went to inquire after their baggage checked through from New York City. As he stood aside and waited his turn with the baggage-master he looked mechanically along the line of fellow passengers. Mankind was always interesting to Bryce Carroday, and a quick eye and retentive memory, with a poised philosophical mental trend, gave him to know many people well who remembered him only as a man of big frame with a pleasant, wholesome face vastly worth looking at twice. And this trait of his served the young lawyer well in many a legal pursuit.

This morning his eye fell on the second man from the head of the line—a little man, hardly noticeable in the crowd, so easy it seemed for him to efface himself in it. Bryce took a step nearer, making no effort to enter the waiting line out of his place. He simply wanted to be sure that he knew this second in line for the same man who had "hung around elevators" in New York City office buildings, "the small, dark man" of "Madame Martingale, the Brainless Wonder's" fortune telling.

The little man made inquiry about storing some trunks, and disappeared. At the doorway Bryce noted that he was joined by an Indian half-breed whose face also was tabulated in the young lawyer's memory. One thing more he noticed to-

day, but soon forgot, was a quaint opal ring with a silver setting on the half-breed's hand as he opened the door. Bryce transacted his business in his turn and went his way to join Jack Lorton. The waiting room was jammed, and Bryce, who never hurried when haste was unessential, bided his time a bit inside the door. Again the crowd was psychologically interesting to him. As he studied it he caught sight of two heads, evidently Mexican, bent close together behind the high-backed seat. A minute, and the conference was broken up and the two lost in the crowd. Bryce gave a low whistle of surprise as a knowing smile came into his eyes.

"If we had the tramp who toured the Rockies with us lang syne our sextet would be complete. The world is so little," he exclaimed to himself. "Talk about our *big America!* We are tied to one another so closely we can't budge without pulling half a continent with us. There's a use for knowing everybody in it, too. I thought I'd never see that precious pair of Mexicans, nor the half-breed with the little cipher man, again after I got to Santa Fe, weeks and weeks ago. Now they bunch together and pass me in a grand review. Jack must wait a minute longer. I have more baggage to check."

The crowd made way for Bryce, as it usually does for a big man, and he reached the ticket window quickly. Two Mexicans, unattached to

each other, were buying tickets—one to Santa Fe and one to Lamy—a few miles farther on. When they had vanished Bryce Carroday also bought a ticket, and went away to find Jack Lorton.

. . . . . .

Journeying southward through the mountains and down the Rio Grande Valley on a beautiful summer day, Bryce Carroday's mind was wrestling with a new problem.

"Reduced caste of players somewhat as to numbers since my last appearance on this Chautauqua circuit," he was thinking. "This time there are only three of us, and two of the three are Mexicans who must have become acquainted with one another since we three went this way before. I knew then they weren't the right flavor and I wasn't off in my suspicions. That half-breed belongs down here, too. I found that out in Santa Fe. But he got on in Denver on that trip, and he's there now. What for? Maybe he is the carrier up and down here. Goes to Denver when my small, dark enemy is needing information. I wonder if he does."

Bryce's brows met in a frowning study. The half-breed's face, and the hand with the opal ring on the door knob, came clearly before his mental vision.

"I wonder if he does," he repeated. "This beats the intrigues of the eighteenth-century

European courts." Then to the conductor, passing, "How soon do we reach the river?"

"In an hour or a little better," the conductor replied.

Bryce looked out of the window. The day was fine, with a breeze pouring through the mountain gorges, and overhead the softest of white clouds asweep in a turquoise sky.

The two Mexicans were seated far apart in front of the young lawyer, who let no motion of theirs escape him. As the train neared the river crossing he opened a letter and spread its contents, a soiled little map, out on his knee, studying it carefully.

"One of these Mexicans goes to Santa Fe, and one to Lamy, eighteen miles farther on, but I go with both. Some feat even for a one-time college athlete who bucked the line and hurdled the full back and made an eighty-yard run down the field for a touchdown the day we won the biggest battle ever fought on American soil—some feat—but I can do it."

He smiled grimly and put away the map.

The train halted at the bridge across the Rio Grande. One of the Mexicans went to the rear platform there, and did not return. While the engine was taking water at the tank above the near-by station the other Mexican also dropped out of sight.

"Huh! No use for me to waste any time now,"

Bryce Carroday commented. "If these two take this place for Santa Fe and Lamy, then it will be easy for me to go with both."

When the train halted at the station the young man left it and without hesitation took his way up the dim trail toward the deserted sheep herder's hut. He walked rapidly and fearlessly, evidently sure of his objective. The little shack was cool, and Bryce, heated by the exercise, seated himself in the window opening and stared about him, fanning his face with his hat. Suddenly before him a gray blanket separated itself from the gray rocks as a very tall Indian started to rise from the ground beside a little piñon tree. At the same time a dark face appeared above the rocks on either side of the red man. Slowly the forms of the two Mexicans came into view and Bryce caught the glint of sunlight on steel, whether of knife or gun barrel he did not stop to discover. With a whoop he leaped out of the window toward the blanketed form. His appearance was so sudden and unexpected, his bulk, in comparison with the Mexicans, so huge, and his voice such a shout of power, that the two men dropped from sight and fled. Not, however, before the Indian's quick eye had sighted both and in an instant comprehended the motive for their presence and cause for their flight.

"Cowards! They fight two against one; never two against two," he exclaimed, coming slowly toward Bryce, who waited beside the hut.

A sound of swiftly scrambling feet as the two men fled verified the statement.

"What were they after, anyhow?" Bryce asked.

"Maybe kill. Maybe steal," the man replied.

"I see. Hold-up men. Well, they are 'going, going, gone' now. I'm glad I happened by if they take two against one only," Bryce said, cheerily.

"You here right time. I pay you. They"—flirting a hand toward where the foiled Mexicans had hidden themselves—"they—just tools for somebody."

"I don't want any pay, brother. We don't buy lives in my business. Whose tools are they?"

"Half-breed Joe."

"Whew! Half-breed Joe! So that's his name!" under his breath. Aloud, Bryce asked, "Who's he, and why?"

"He tool, too," the Indian responded.

"Whose tool?" Bryce questioned.

"Don't know." The Indian shook his head.

And Bryce knew the end of that lead had come.

"Why you come here?" the red man asked, bluntly.

"To see you. I had a map of the place given me to show just how to find you if you were here. See." Bryce held up the soiled piece of paper. "You made it, I was told. I want to go home with you."

"You steal that map," the Indian declared.

"You're a liar by the clock. If you accuse me of stealing I'll kick you clear into the Rio Grande."

Bryce spoke sternly, but there was a twinkle in his blue eye. The ghost of a grin hovered somewhere about the other man's face; not on his lips, nor in his eyes—just a shadow of a relaxing of the stolid muscles.

"Where you get map?" he inquired.

"It was given to me by one most interested."

"Who send you?" There was a puzzled tone in the gruffly put query.

"Nobody. I came without sending," Bryce explained.

"What for see me?" the red man persisted.

"Come in here. I'm tired and warm. Have a smoke."

The young lawyer offered the old man a long cigar, and the two sat down just inside the doorway of the hut.

"Listen, now, brother, and tell me all you want to when I get through," Bryce began.

The Indian lighted the cigar and smoked in silence, alert to every word.

"I saw that half-breed Joe up in Denver. He wore an opal ring set in silver such as the Hopis make. I don't know his business there. I merely saw him. I've seen a lot of men who were tools who didn't look like him. I saw these two Mexicans there in another room of the big railroad station. They left Denver for Santa Fe and Lamy. I left for Santa

Fe and Lamy. They dropped off the train back near the station down yonder. I dropped off. They came up here. I came up. They rise when you rise, ready to—steal—maybe. I also rise—and yell. They hear my yell and do not like it. It means bloody murder when I yell. Even the Huns didn't like it. I don't like it myself, but I take it with me when I go into the mountains or among Mexicans. Don't have to carry so many guns then. And it was well, maybe, that I did yell just now."

"Very well," the red man grunted. "Why do Mexicans come here, and not the man I come here to see to-day? I do not understand."

"I do," the lawyer muttered, under his breath. "It's getting clear to me. This half-breed Joe, your little man's tool, sees your little man, and said little man sends two Mexicans in his stead. He's a versatile cuss, that same little man, but my notion is that Joe is stupid enough to be all right." Aloud, Bryce continued:

"I have this map to show me where to meet you. I came to ask you a few questions. Can we go to your home?"

The Indian shook his head.

"Maybe later. Go on," he said.

"All right, brother. You remember old Sidol up in the mountains. You lived with him and buried him. You had his papers and some other property. You brought them down to his twin

sons. One of them is dead now, but his boy, old Sidol's grandson, lives. He and his uncle are in trouble over the division of that mining claim. You have papers you have never given up. They tell of this division line. You know what you have never told. Now old man Sidol's grandson is about to lose his property. He has a pretty squaw and two little papooses. Old man Sidol loved that boy Edward, you remember. If you keep the papers, if you don't tell what you know, they will be made poor, very poor. You were faithful to old Sidol. He gave you all his goods. He gave you a little claim somewhere in the mountains down here."

Bryce paused as the other man leaned forward and stared earnestly into his face.

"You sure he *gave* me? Nobody take it from me?" he asked.

"Dead sure. I witnessed some of the papers to that myself. In fact, I was really responsible for your getting it clear. I have been told it is a very difficult place to find, that it is practically worthless, and that you have never been seen there since it became yours," Bryce said, studying the face before him.

"It belong to me? You make it sure?" Again the eager scrutiny of the lawyer's face.

"It was one of my first acts after I was admitted to the bar. I was very anxious to get it right. I know," Bryce assured his questioner. "It was

good of old Mr. Sidol, I am sure. He may have asked you to be good to young Edward. I don't know. All I do know is how the matter stands to-day. I came to see you. I don't want anything of yours. I'm not one of those Mexicans, which that half-breed Joe hires, as you think. Remember, I'm not sure Joe does it. Can you take care of me overnight? And will you help Edward Sidol if he needs you? Will you be true to all the promises you made to a dying old man?"

Bryce Carroday was surmising some of these conditions, but he reasoned that if he guessed wrongly the Indian would quickly put him right.

For a time the Indian smoked silently. Then:

"You save me from Mexicans. They steal, maybe kill. Cowards! Half-breed Joe send them. I am grateful to you. You make my land sure mine. Nobody get it. Come home with me."

That night Bryce Carroday slept under the beautifully woven Navajo blankets on a bunk in the old Indian's snug little adobe hut. The appointments of the place were clear to him. The old mine owner had left all his household belongings to his faithful servant. Had taught him good use of the English language. Had shown him how to keep a neat abode even in that lonely hidden mountain gorge, and how to prepare food for a gentleman to enjoy. Bryce made no effort to discover anything, asked no questions, nor by act or word was anything but a receiver of hospitality.

But he felt intuitively that something was amiss, he could not tell what.

In the evening the old Indian grew more talkative and told many stories of the elder Sidol's lonely life, his struggles, hopes, and final disappointments; and at length, something of his last hours, of the long wait for the snows to melt enough to permit the faithful servant to bury the body and to keep his promise to bring his master's papers to the city. Bryce was adroit, but nothing availed to secure what he most wanted to find out.

Then the host sat silent for a long time. When he spoke again the matter cleared at once for his guest.

"I keep sacred what I know. Where it is best to use, I use what I know. If Edward Sidol want me, I go to him with a friend he send to go with me. I tell him what I know *for him.*"

"Any friend?" Bryce asked, eagerly.

The Indian stiffened and shook his head.

"No. No."

Bryce waited.

"Not any friend. I go with friend of Edward Sidol if he is not army man, not soldier. I go with no fighting white man."

"I see. No soldier. No military man," Bryce suggested.

"No. Soldier, no—"

The Indian paused, stood up, and looked straight at Bryce Carroday. Then slowly and

dramatically he drew the pictured page of a newspaper from beneath his blanket, opened it, and laid it out on the table.

"You drive away Mexicans. You make my land my own. I do you good some day. I do not forget. But—see."

Bryce looked at the faces pictured on the page, at a military group, encircled with red-ink lines, and at the group of attorneys with the judiciary, encircled by blue lines; then turned questioningly toward his host, who answered his look with perfectly good English.

"I do not trust any soldier, any military man. No." Sweeping his hand over the other picture, he went on: "I do not go with any law man, not one. You are good. I will not forget, but—I go to Edward Sidol with no law man."

Slowly pointing his finger toward a face in the legal company, he looked at Bryce.

"Yes, that's my picture. You don't stand for the law, eh?"

The Indian shook his head.

"You send friend of Edward Sidol to go with me, but no army, no law. I do not go then."

The old man's face grew set and the young man knew he had reached his limit there.

"One minute. Let me see the date of that paper," he said. "Yes, that's all right. I remember the day it was printed. I think I left that very page on a seat in the train when I got

off to eat lunch somewhere. Thank you, brother. You will hear from Edward Sidol's friend soon. I'm sleepy now."

Bryce Carroday slept soundly that night, utterly unconscious of the fact that the old Indian watched beside him all night long. And that at daydawn prayers went up for his safety here and his happiness hereafter. Deep in the old man's heart was the gratitude he felt for benefits rendered. No harm must come to this fair-spoken young man. But—no army, no law. He had sworn to that, and—an Indian does not break his vow.

The days following Jack Lorton's arrival in Denver were full of hard work. Jack plunged into his duties with characteristic force. Whatever came from his hand must be accurate, clear, and exhaustive. And that kind of effort takes time and energy and patient industry. It was on record that nobody except Bryce Carroday had ever called him from a piece of work until it was finished. And Bryce couldn't have done it if he hadn't just come back from the dead into Jack's life. When the result of his findings in the Sidol mines property was ready to be placed before the firm of which Bryce Carroday was the junior member, there was no flaw to be picked, no conclusion to be questioned.

On the evening before Lorton's report was to

be presented the two young men sat in a secluded corner of an upper corridor of the Brown Palace Hotel, looking down at the human eddy in the big rotunda below them. They had many things to say to each other to-night, and the pause before the beginning of a long conference was upon them. So they watched the crowded lobby in silence.

Suddenly Jack gave a start. At the same instant Bryce Carroday leaned forward and stared over the railing at the floor below. But the attention of the two men was not directed to the same spot. The lawyer was looking at a guest registering at the office desk, a finely built man in military garb. Jack Lorton's eyes were attracted to a column some distance away, beside which a woman stood looking up at him with a smile on her fair face.

"Does the old Horse Thief make his report to-morrow?" Bryce asked, carelessly, as he leaned back in his chair out of view of the crowd below.

"Yes, to the firm to-morrow; to the junior member to-night," Jack replied, also settling down out of range of the rotunda floor.

"There's a lot to be said on both sides before the glims are doused in this tavern to-night. Go ahead," Bryce returned.

"The first thing I learned was that your client's name is Sidol. I suspected as much, though, from what you said on the train coming out, coupled

with my own information—but that's another story," Jack began.

"No, Jack, it's a chapter of the same yarn," Bryce interrupted. "We'll thrash that phase out later. Go ahead."

"Whose report is this?" Jack inquired.

"The best fellow's in the world. Now, thrice told, *go ahead*," Bryce retorted.

"Well then, I find the fellow who was doing this work for you was off his calculations forty ways from the jack. I find by investigation that General Sidol's claim based on the document he holds is in the main a just one. The division line across the property runs the rich productive portion, not a very big area at that, to the living brother's share; the part proven worthless to the dead brother's son. There's no way to change the measurements. You win. If you wanted to lose you should have kept the other man. I don't know where he came from, but to be ungrammatically exact, I know blamed well where he got to, and that's just nowhere. You were right about him. He was playing the game for somebody, but it wasn't in the interest of either your client or the truth. That's all of my side of it. To-morrow I report to your firm, and then I'm through with my part in the case of Sidol *versus* Sidol and ready to move on to new pastures. But before I go, there are some things I want to get out of my system, things you don't measure with in-

struments like mine. I spent considerable time in that lonely cabin in the cañon on the Sidol holdings. You know I'm what you and Cid Jannison call an idealist. Well, all alone up there on June evenings, when my day's work was done and I had no memories of my own to worry over, I pictured out the last days of the elder Sidol, the general's father, alone up there with an Indian servant. He had no cause for loving one of his twin sons more than the other, no reason for dividing his property, even if he had known how, in a way to favor the general above the dead brother. If there wasn't any motive, why did he do it? And, too, I wonder what became of the noble red man who was in at the death and buried him up there and brought his effects down to the settlement and then disappeared. Why should this Lo disappear? I asked myself these questions of the 'rocks, crags, and mounds confusedly hurled'; but said 'rocks, crags, and mounds' were as mum as the seas that don't give up nothin'. I'm not a lawyer and my cogitations in the cabin may all have been moonshine, but my lines are true. Again, you win."

Jack drew a deep breath and leaned back farther in his chair.

"You are a lawyer by natural instinct, Jack, or you couldn't be an engineer," Bryce began. "I told you back in New York City not long ago that there's mighty little variation in human business, and you see a lot more than your lines and angles

and sectors. The question you asked about old Sidol's motive and about the Indian are the ones I've held the case back on. I want to be sure the old man's will *was* in that division. I want to know if he made it, or his twin boys, or maybe one of the twins, and the other signed it. General Sidol comes to us with a rather indefinite dividing line as his claim to the property. I want to know what the Indian knows—"

"Have you ever found him?" Jack interrupted.

"Yes, while you were up in the mountains measuring by day and mooning, as you say, by night, I was chasing over the country around Santa Fe, New Mexico, to find this old redskin, and I found him."

"What does he say?" Jack inquired, eagerly.

"Whose report is this?" Bryce drawled.

"The worst shyster lawyer's that ever was admitted to the bar. I resign. Go ahead."

"Oh, I'm through. I found him, said Indian. But the sea and the crags are chattering magpies compared with all he will ever give up to a lawyer. He's old and stubborn and leery of the law and every inch an Indian. He knows something I've got to know before your report goes in. It doesn't go in to-morrow. There's more disappearing to be done. You aren't through yet."

"Are you?" Jack replied.

"When I'm done with you you won't be able to speak above a whisper," Bryce declared.

The joy in the boy heart of each man bubbled up irrepressibly for a moment after the old college manner, in this renewed association. But the two grew serious again at once.

"Your next move is not much in linears and triangles and things," Bryce continued. "What this Indian knows he means to use in his own way, and he's as sly as a lynx. He says he will talk to young Sidol and any friend of his not in the law or the army. He's been warned of these two by somebody. I'm after that somebody, and I'll get him yet. He's the one quantity not designated in this case. But there's every reason for my keeping away from the redskin. I'm a lawyer. Young Sidol isn't my client. I must avoid even the appearance of an interest in his affairs, on account of his wife, though Heaven knows that, in a way, is the most impersonal thing about the matter to me. I want you to go to New Mexico and get hold of this Indian, if you can, and bring him to the nephew, who will meet you somewhere. I'll see to all the details, legal and otherwise. Will you do this for me, Jack? If you will, I tell you I'll have this case of Sidol *versus* Sidol settled out of court yet. And then if my seniors can't agree with their junior partner, why, the world is wide— What is it, George?" Bryce stopped abruptly as a bell boy approached.

"Special, sir." The boy offered the young man a letter.

Bryce put it on the arm of his chair while he signed the boy's paper. It was big and thick, addressed in a woman's hand and postmarked New York City. Bryce looked at it, looked twice, then hastily put it in his pocket. Jack, who was leaning forward, looking at the crowded lobby, did not notice the letter nor the haste. He wasn't thinking of New York nor of New England just then, but of that woman who had smiled up at him from her place beside the column on the floor below. He was wondering, too, how to begin with Bryce in this matter that must be considered now, when Bryce suddenly opened the subject for him.

"Our client is already on the ground for to-morrow. I saw him registering down there a little while ago. He will have to wait. Your report isn't ready yet, and you leave early in the morning for further data—no matter where. I still control that phase."

Bryce had also leaned forward and surveyed the crowd in the rotunda.

"Incidentally, I was interested in what you said just now about suspecting that Sidol was our man from information of your own, added to what I had told you on the train. Has that information any bearing here?" Bryce put the question squarely.

"Is General Sidol in Colorado? I saw his wife down there just now. Yes, I'll go to New Mexico for you. But I think we had better get clear on

the personal side of this thing now, Bryce," Jack replied. "As to my own information, when you laid the case before me coming out here I was struck with the likeness of the details to what Mrs. Sidol had said to me one night in New York City, after she had interviewed you in my office, in the afternoon." Jack paused a moment. "By the way, I heard from Cid to-day. She tells me my little office girl, the red-headed one I call 'Live Wire,' is having trouble. Her husband's health is about gone and she's devoted to him. I'm grieved to know this and I wish I could do something for her. Her old father has just died and the little cat is an affectionate daughter. It broke her down, it seems. There is a little property left her, all tangled up some way. I happen to think of her because she told me of Mrs. Sidol's call on you there. Imagine my surprise. I had just come from her rooms where she had begged me to urge you to help to stop that divorce matter on account of loss of property, broken homes, children disgraced, and all that. But I was thinking only of possible possessions in New York, or New Jersey, not at all in Colorado, you see. And then to find that she had already met you that afternoon, and later, when you told me, coming out here, about the woman who made the match for the nephew, I realized she might have known of you out here after all. And knowing she can trap the devil into serving her instead of her serving him, I confess,

Bryce, I haven't known just what to look for next. She's downstairs now, loaded, ready for action, I'll warrant."

Bryce Carroday sat back in his chair, his hands clasped behind his head, staring at Jack as he talked.

"Met me that afternoon! Knew me in Denver! Why, John Fairborough Lorton, I knew that woman before the U. S. got over being too proud to fight. She saved me from shipping home on an ill-starred vessel. I owe her my life, maybe, but, good Lord! man, I don't owe her my soul." Bryce's voice was low pitched with anger. "I didn't dream that you knew her when I went to New York, and when I found her there in your office I knew it meant mischief for somebody. Next thing I saw a vase you had brought home from France and had given Cid, and I knew the thing had a still deeper root. Then she called you to her rooms when the general was out of the city and I didn't hear from you till after midnight, that evening of Miss Cid's dinner. Knowing her a whole lot too well, I was worried about you, especially when you wouldn't talk about the matter. And all the while you were looking out for me, a Colorado tenderfoot in New York City. Good boy! Are you sure she's in Denver?"

"Yes, dead sure. She was smiling up at us two just now," Jack replied. "For my part, I'd rather have her here than in New York City, though it means mischief wherever she smiles."

"I wonder the general brought her along. Only that divorce business isn't advertised here, till this suit is settled," Bryce commented. "Well, at least we have been a precious pair of guardian angels for each other—the real heavenly twins."

"While we were trying to build a wall of defense around each other we built up a wall between ourselves, it seems—a little bit of 'men's misunderstandings,' only it was for, and not against, each other we were blundering along. That's the beauty of it," Jack replied. "As to Estelle Sidol—Tellie, they called her back in Paris—the general didn't *bring* her; she *came*. She wants the divorce stayed because she wants a slice of that property, and she's holding that over his head to ruin his case in court here if he doesn't agree to stop proceedings back East. The Lord gave her beauty, so she has only two wants, money and men's admiration; and she'll always get them from somebody. She thinks her children are in her way in all this. At least she told me the last thing in New York that she's hoping to get them adopted by their father's maiden sister. I suppose she has accomplished that by this time. Think of it! There's only one maiden lady I know who would seem to me like a real mother to adopt children, and that's my cousin Cid. I don't know why she never married, but I'll venture to say it wasn't because she wouldn't be as dear in a home as she is queenly in social leadership."

Bryce's face was a study as Jack talked of Cid, and he mechanically felt of the big letter in his pocket. When he spoke, however, it was of the business of the hour.

"I've a lot of mail to open now, Jack. Call around at ten sharp and we'll get everything ready for you to start on your trip to-morrow. Yes"—added as an afterthought—"Mrs. Sidol's children are legally adopted by their aunt. Their mother has no claim on them any more."

Jack was too tired with the day's work to think to ask Bryce how he knew of this adoption.

And the two friends separated.

Jack Lorton went at once to the telegraph office and sent a wire to Cid Jannison in New York City. It read:

Finished work here. Leaving state to-morrow. Comfort Gwin. Letter follows.—JACK.

Then he strolled back to an upper corridor and found a seat where he could look down on the milling multitude for a while. He was thinking not so much of the matters of to-morrow as of little Janis Gwin, saucy and steel pointed, but accurate, industrious, and loyal to the core.

"Poor little cub!" he murmured. "She has nobody left now but 'Peter Rabbit,' and he's sick and too dependent on her to be any help. I hope Cid won't be too busy to look after her. She's out of Leslie's group of needy souls, and yet she needs comforting."

An hour later the wires carried a second telegram to Cid Jannison in New York City. It ran:

The Gen. & wife just arrived. Jack leaving state tomorrow.—BRYCE.

Just as the young lawyer re-entered his room there was a rap on his door. He opened it to find Estelle Sidol standing before him.

XIV

HELPING THE HELPFUL

CID and Leslie Jannison were lingering over a late breakfast in Cid's cozy breakfast room, talking of their plans for the day, when Ellis brought in the morning mail. Cid sorted out the letters, two for herself and a dozen for Leslie.

"The popular lady," she said, placing Leslie's letters beside her plate.

A look of weariness came into Leslie's eyes. Her work had been especially heavy for weeks, with the last few days filled with the call the pocket-book cannot answer—the call for sympathy, to which neither finances nor human hands can give aid. And there was nowhere any promise of a limit to this exacting, exhaustive service that so swiftly eats up the vital energy of the worker.

Cid read her own letters without comment, then turned to her cousin with an expression that Leslie had learned long ago to interpret.

"Well, Ciddie?" she asked.

"No, it is not well. You are not well," Cid replied.

Leslie smiled and stretched out her arm from which the lace sleeve of her morning dress fell back, revealing its shapely strength and whiteness.

"Which proves nothing," Cid declared. "How many strong, vigorous folks drop in the harness suddenly these days!"

"Give it up. Ask the life-insurance actuaries. That's their statistics," Leslie replied. "There might be a worse fate awaiting, anyhow. Plenty of statistics for—"

She was going to say "lonely old age." She had many incidents of that kind pulling at her heartstrings this very morning.

"Yes, I know, New York is full of it, and some little outside of the city, now and again," Cid said. "Dependent, degenerate, defective—'the poor we have always with us'—but you can reach the dependent with your purse, the degenerate with the New Testament, and as to the defective, well, idiots are usually a cheerful lot at least."

"You are some of all three, you old hard-heart. I wish you'd shut up."

Leslie's lips were smiling, but her eyes filled with tears.

"Now I know I'm right." Cid spoke gently. All her life Leslie had known the comfort of that tone in her cousin's voice. "Listen a little while to the wisdom of the ancients," Cid went on. "You are 'rockribbed' by inheritance, tough sinewed like your old Puritan forbears. You are young and all

that, but, my dear, you must never leave out of account the mental and spiritual forces that make or break us. You finished college in the hours of war's first stress. Your diploma was given you on the June day that the national draft registration called all of our best young men into army service. You began at once an intensive Red Cross course of study, and followed that with months, endlessly long months, of the most agonizing service a woman can give—the nurse behind the battle lines. You came home, and almost without a day of rest you plunged into welfare work, giving your money—the easiest gift—your time, your strength, your heart."

"Would you want me to give less, and be a true American?" Leslie asked.

"To be a true American is to be a big American. To be big includes not only faithfulness to duty in the daily calls, in the day of small things; it means calmness, and breadth of view, and time for growth. It means a steady altar fire, not a big blaze that is spent in one great flash. You don't need a doctor. You are not that kind of a sick girl. Rest will bring back all the spring lost out of your muscles, and new activity to your tired brain cells. But you can't rest here and you will get provincial if you stay in one place all the time. You know that. To recreate yourself you must get some new stuff. In a word, Les, let's take a vacation. Let's go far enough from New York City to love it to

pieces when we get back. Let's get a grip on the size and 'infinite variety' of the homeland. There's only one flag for all of it, one kind of hearthstone for its multimany kinds of homes. Think it over a bit, dearie."

"But, Ciddie, I really could not be happy doing nothing," Leslie insisted.

"No. But it all depends on what you call nothing. To me it is partly the life so jammed full of doing things that there's no time to *live* and get anything done well. . . . Fine cream this morning. My breakfast will always be my best meal—appetizingly speaking."

The talk ran then in different lines, until Cid suddenly recalled her letters.

"I almost forgot to say that I heard from Jack."

"Yes?"

Leslie and Cid talked freely of the absent one now. So freely that Cid sometimes doubted Leslie's feeling in the matter. Either she had overcome wonderfully or she had never really deeply cared for Cid's beloved boy cousin.

"He's on his way to the Pacific coast now. Destination to be announced later. But he's well —and would be happy, only there's a little care on his mind right now."

"Yes." Much more indifferently this time.

Cid noted that and took courage. It augured well.

"Yes, but it wouldn't interest you, maybe; not a case of social welfare, like our work, exactly. It's his office girl, Janis Gwin. You know there are office girls *and* office girls, just as there are all types of folks in any other calling. We do not grade by the *work*, but by the *woman*. Some of my best friends earn their living on a weekly salary. Some of the cheapest that I know control a million dollars in their own name. But as to this Janis—let me tell you about her."

Then came the story of Janis as Cid knew it.

"Jack is always adorable where human needs call," Cid declared. "He helped this little woman to carry her burden when he was here. Now he is away, he hopes that I'll look after her, for she is a brave fighter and a loyal employee. It is her heart's care that makes her burden heavy now; her old father has just died, and her husband is slowly fading. This isn't a slum case, not a dependent, a degenerate, nor a defective, just a struggle, single-handed, as thousands struggle every day, some to victory, some to defeat. Shall I ring for Ellis to call our car? It takes a long time to get to the places you are headed for to-day."

For a minute Leslie did not reply.

"I'm thinking over what you suggested just now," she said at last. "I believe you are right, as usual. I think I do need rest. I have been going the pace that tires, if it does not kill. I've looked on human suffering and heard the cries of

sorrow until I am exhausted sympathetically." She paused.

"Giving sympathy doesn't exhaust," Cid commented, mentally. "Giving love brings more love. It's your own heart that's wearing you out."

"Cid, let's take a long trip somewhere. You and I, as you suggest. Let's really see some of our homeland that we have not looked upon. Let's bestow the smile of our approval on new scenes that Old Glory overshadows."

"Good girl, Leslie! But, frankly, can you go far enough, and stay long enough, to make it worth our while? If we go with a care tied to our minds we'll come back unrested, and we won't have time for more than a daily sunshine smile and all that sort of thing along the way. We can't study conditions. We can't stop to nurse the sick in Michigan or Mississippi."

What was Cid trying to accomplish? Leslie waited again before she replied:

"Well, let's *do* good while we are *being* so tremendously good."

Behind the girl's calmness lay deep emotion. Cid knew that, and waited.

"I've just thought this out. Listen to it. Let's go to New Mexico—'the Land of the Delight Makers,' a New Mexican soldier called it once in a hut in France. Poor fellow! The Land of Pure Delight lay only a few minutes away from him as he spoke."

"Always these memories for Leslie. She must quit work for a while," Cid thought.

"And, Cid, why not take this Janis Gwin along for a vacation for her?"

"Glorious for her. But her heartstrings are wound round that little pale-faced husband of hers. She won't leave him behind till the sod is between the two." Cid spoke feelingly. "And you can't offer her charity, either. She's clear above that, the gritty little thing."

"I don't offer her charity. I offer her opportunity. I need a secretary to help me with my correspondence on this journey. I will pay a good salary for her service. And, Cid, so many times I've heard of New Mexico as a land of sunshine for sick people. Why not take Janis's husband, too? He must get out of the city, you say. It might be just the thing for him to go to this land of sunshine, and he could be very useful on the way, in little things. We can give him a chance to get well. We are not in a hurry, you know. What do you say?"

It was Cid's eyes that were full of tears, now. Not alone for the joy that this plan would bring to Janis and her husband, nor the delight it would bring to Jack Lorton to know it was thought out and carried out by Leslie. But because Cid knew in her heart why Leslie had planned this. Her efforts could have run in a score of other lines as easily and as reasonably as in this plan to help Janis Gwin. It was because of Jack she was

doing it. Deep in her heart there was as yet no change in this wonderful girl, and Cid's cup of joy was full this morning.

"I do approve. We will not waste time. You must see Janis at once," she said.

"I? Why not you?" Leslie inquired.

"Because you pay the salary. It is your own affair. I'm the party's chaperon."

Leslie hesitated, then looked up with a frank smile.

"Then give me a copy of the message to Janis. I'll see her before noon. Meantime you'd better begin on our itinerary."

"Let it make itself. We go to New Mexico. Where else the events of the day must decide," Cid declared.

So the matter hung, with a busy planning of details in case all the plans carried with Janis and her husband.

On this morning Janis Gwin was sitting disconsolately at her desk. Beside her machine lay a pile of copy, but her fingers were idle and her eyes were staring at nothing. Since the afternoon that Bryce Carroday had spent in Jack Lorton's office the little woman had changed visibly. The bright-red hair was still fashionably dressed; her black mourning gown and her black oxfords with big black bows were as dapper as the gray garb and the gray-suede pumps with the glittering steel ornaments that she had formerly worn. But the

face of Janis Gwin, the quick movement, the bright, vivacious manner, all were changed. The mouth had lost its saucy grin for a line of determination. The eyes were still bright and observing, and the little snub nose was carefully powdered from habit. But the old alertness, the general grip on everything, was lost. And while her industrious periods had been entirely self-determined, and in the main she was a lazy little cat, the idleness to-day was clearly not the result of sheer indifference to duty.

"Strange how awfully alone you can be in the town you've lived in all your life," she mused. "I might as well be in the wilds of—Ohio. I feel like I'd never see a soul again that knew Mr. Lorton now he's sure gone to stay. He won't come back, I just know he won't. And 'Peter Rabbit' won't get better, and daddy's—away to stay."

As she sat gazing into vacancy her eyes grew dull with tears and her lips quivered. Then she mechanically fitted a sheet of paper into her typewriter and leaned over her pile of copy disinterestedly. As she hesitated she heard a step behind her, but she did not care to look around—Janis Gwin, whose business in life was to know who came, and why, however great or little the rank of the comer might be.

"Excuse me, but aren't you the young lady who was in the office of Grace and Grace's law firm some time ago?"

It was the voice of a gentlewoman.

Janis looked up languidly, but her countenance changed quickly from indifference to interest. The woman standing before her was tall and slight and elderly. She was simply dressed, but there was no shoddy thread woven in anywhere. She had a modest, almost bashful, reserve of manner, but certain lines in her face, a certain strength in her low voice, suggested a reserve force of character back of a reserved exterior. Janis Gwin took in all these things with one stab of her steel-blue eyes, her keenly retentive mind recalling this woman instantly.

"Yes, ma'am," she answered, quickly, "I was there, but it was their regular girl talked with you. I was just helping her that day. I saw you, though." Then, as a shade of disappointment fell upon the woman's face, she asked: "Anything I can do here? This is a real-estate office, mostly."

"I am here on some other business, but I want a letter written right away. You were in John Fairborough Lorton's office, were you not?"

Janis sighted a friendly craft in her dreary ocean.

"Yes, I was with Mr. Lorton a long time." The tone was a cross between proprietorship and homesick longing.

The older woman smiled kindly.

"Then you *are* the girl I am looking for. I have

too much to do to go over to the office of Grace and Grace. Can you give me Mr. Bryce Carroday's address? He is with Mr. Lorton, isn't he?"

With Mr. Lorton, not Mr. Lorton with him. That was the right way to put it to Janis Gwin.

"Yes, ma'am, I have their address. I'll write your letter." Janis turned to her machine and readily and deftly clicked off the letter as it was dictated.

When the woman was gone the girl sat staring at her pile of copy as yet untouched this morning.

"Who the Sam-Hill is she, now? She'll never play any big part in *my* great American novel, but I sorto like her. And she tells Mr. 'Big Man,' Bryce C., she's taken legal action as per their interview, regarding the heirs, and asks him to report on anything she ought to know. She hain't got no divorce, case pending. I'll bet a potato she never was married in all her young life. I just can't tie her to anything yet. No heirs in my circle needing any legal action. And she's glad he understands about the money matters. Much that tells anybody, I'll say. And what's Bryce C. got to do with it? Well, she is refined. I can't say about her financial rating. I'll cross her orbit again one of these days, sure. Folks hunting folks who are 'with Mr. Lorton' sure to find me somewhere."

But the interest in this passing stranger was soon forgotten in the burden on the mind of the

little stenographer, and the reality of her sadder day came back upon her. As she bent over her work at last, some one came softly toward her desk and drew a chair up and sat down; she lifted her eyes to look into the big, kindly, dark eyes of Leslie Jannison.

"I am Miss Jannison's cousin, who is a cousin of Mr. John Fairborough Lorton. You were in his office when he was down on Forty-fourth Street. He sent a message to you by Miss Jannison."

Janis looked steadily at the girl as she spoke, the bright eyes reading the face more readily than her visitor could have guessed. Of all the ladies who had ever called at her desk, this one appealed to her most.

"Is Mr. Lorton coming back soon?" she asked.

"I don't know," Leslie answered.

"Where is he now?" Janis queried, eagerly.

"Somewhere near the Pacific coast; I don't know where," Leslie replied again.

Janis contemplated her pile of copy thoughtfully.

"It was good of him to remember me," she said, presently.

Then, as the memory of his sympathy for her in the loss of her mother came to her, with the lack of that sympathy in her present loss, her eyes filled with tears. She turned away and began fingering the keys of her machine. Her caller also turned away, but not so quickly that Janis failed to note that other eyes than hers had tears in them.

"I wonder if this ain't that girl 'Big Sister' went broke—I mean heartbroke—over. I'll bet a potato it is," she mentally decided. "And I'll bet a potato she loves him too. Golly! I'm for her."

In a moment Janis looked up with a bright smile, and life took on a new interest.

"You never told me what he said yet," she reminded Leslie. "Was it anything special, or just 'remember me to all inquirin' friends'? He was always so good to everybody."

"It was specially to you. In his letter to his cousin he says"—Leslie read from the copy of the message—" 'tell Janis I think of her and need her help often. Tell her, I know she will be brave and not grieve too much for her old father whom she cared for so tenderly. If she needs any help that I can give about that property, she must write to me. And tell her above everything else, to take good care of herself, so that I will find her all right when I see her again. No use to tell her to look after 'Peter Rabbit'; she'll do that to a finish.' "

"Is he coming back soon?" again Janis asked, eagerly.

"I don't know, Mrs. Gwin, but I don't believe he will. He was in Colorado, but he has gone farther west, probably to the Puget Sound country, my cousin Cid tells me. She had a wire from him yesterday."

Janis made a swift mental entry.

" 'My cousin Cid tells me,' and him leavin' New York City for her sake. And her comin' to see me 'stead of Cid. Cid sent her. Good scout, that Cid! I'd join the procession right here, near the head of the colyum, only there's 'Peter Rabbit' losing ground all the time. I'm done for. Lord! I'm givin' in! But I'm not going back on 'Big Sister' yet."

"Tell Mr. Lorton, when you write him, I'm much obliged. Tell him daddy didn't never know when he went. Just sweet as a baby" —the voice trembled—"and I'm doing well, and I think 'Peter Rabbit' will get stronger when fall comes. Be sure you thank him for me, yourself, Miss—"

There was a depth of adroitness in the request that the visitor could never have dreamed possible in the little stranger.

"Jannison. I'm Leslie, Cid's cousin."

"Uh-huh. And you'll tell him?" Janis broke in, eagerly.

"I'll tell Cid to. Bringing the message is her part in my coming. I have a part of my own, too, for coming here, Mrs. Gwin," Leslie went on.

"I'm Janis to all them that ever liked Mr. Lorton. He called me that sometimes. Sometimes just 'Live Wire.' But he never spoke unkind; he couldn't."

The sharp edge was off Janis Gwin again, but the instinctive joy in a game where shrewdness

and quickness count was an inherent part of her. Instinctively she knew that she might render her beloved employer a service, and she came to the bat eagerly.

"Janis, I have come to make a suggestion to you. I've been very busy for a long time—really since we went into the World War—and I'm thinking of taking a trip somewhere. Not for rest so much as for change and to do some studying in a new line. I want some one to help me with my heavy correspondence while I'm away. It's not so important which way we go—north, south, east, or west. I'm really studying America, you see."

"The chawming prevaricator! She's going West and she knows it. Golly! I'm for her again," Janis mentally recorded, as Leslie continued:

"But could you go with us? Cousin Cid is going along, too. Are you too devoted to this new position here to leave it for a few weeks?"

"I don't like it a bit, and I'm not needed in this office, either. There's nobody put out if I leave in ten minutes. But, Miss Jannison, I'm not ahead on my bank savings. I had a lot of little expenses on account of daddy, and my husband ain't strong. So we've not saved up much yet. But I love him. He's all I got now. I'd love to have a home so much. Tain't right for me to think about a home, and babies, like some folks can have, but I just couldn't go away with you and leave 'Peter Rabbit'—that's Mr.

Gwin—even if I could afford the money. I'd 'peak and pine,' as Mr. Lorton said I'd do if I stayed in an office too long. I'd love to help Mr. Lorton's friends, though, anyway. And I'm sure a trip would do me a woppin lot of good. But 'Peter Rabbit' needs it a world more 'n I do. It's awfully good of you to think of me, though. I heard Miss Cid's cousin did a lot of welfare work for poor folks. That kind of uplifters don't often think about us who are too weak to fight on and too proud to break off till we drop with our boots on. You're out of your class, seems to me, and better 'n you think you are."

Through the girl's quick mind ran the picture of a journey away from high walls, clanging noises, crowded streets, and tubes and tunnels. A busy journey, for Janis, would be seeing something new every minute, a line of days that were different. But the sorrowful face of a lonely little man rose up between her and that journey—the only soul, now daddy was gone, who really truly cared for her, "Peter Rabbit," her all.

Leslie studied the girl before her, a strange little type of humanity, vain, not overeducated, careless and independent, a city-grown plant of frail rooting; but she loved one man enough to deny herself everything for him—an office girl with no chance for ambition, no promotion, nothing ahead of her but a sameness of days; and down in her heart was a hungering for home and chil-

dren—for the fullness of life. Was Janis Gwin below her, or above her, in the trend of their days? When she spoke again there was a new note of sympathy in her voice that let down all barriers between the two.

"I had thought of Mr. Gwin, too. From what you say, and from what Mr. Lorton wrote my cousin, he would be benefited by a change, too, so here is the plan I have."

Janis Gwin's eyes shown with a new brightness as Leslie went on.

"My cousin Cid and I think of going out to New Mexico. It has a wonderful climate, I'm told. If you and Mr. Gwin will go with us you could help me and he could be so handy about getting porters and all that. I'll pay all the expenses, and you a little salary, besides. It will be such a help to us, and, from what Mr. Lorton said in his letter to my cousin, it would please him, too."

Leslie was more diplomatic than she knew in that last sentence.

Janis Gwin sat staring at the keys of her machine and the untouched sheet of paper ready for service, her mind reviewing all the possibilities of the situation.

" 'Mr. Lorton writes my cousin Cid,' " she mimicked, mentally. "I ain't so easy as that, dear lady. It's for 'Big Sister's' sake you're being good to me, and it is because you love him you're doing it. Mr. Lorton on the Pacific coast? He

ain't. He's in your heart right here in this room —and for his sake— Oh, when I write the Great American Novel I'll chuck in this episode— Maybe they'll be a tradin' of favors yet. But now, New Mexico, and the clear sunshine, and them high altitudes, and 'Peter Rabbit' breathing deep without hurting—wouldn't daddy be pleased! I believe we're nearest to the dead, anyway, where there is lots of sunshine."

The girl lifted eyes glistening through tears.

"It's awfully good of you, Miss Jannison, and I can be ready to start to New Mexico at a quarter to three. It's two-forty now, and if some time the way opens to give back good for good, count on me."

Leslie's smile and handclasp were her only reply. But no service in a home of squalor ever brought her more joy than the gratitude in the tear-wet eyes of Janis Gwin, as the two bade each other good-by.

Leslie went straight to Cid Jannison's apartment to begin preparation for the journey. Janis Gwin unlocked a drawer in her desk and took out a crumpled sheet of paper whereon a note had been typewritten. Pinning this on a smooth, typewritten sheet of the same size, she folded both into a small envelope, sealed it, wrote a brief inscription on it, and dropped it into her chain purse, snapping the fastening with a metallic click that was truly Janis-like. In a twinkling she had again become John Fairborough Lorton's "Live Wire."

XV

THE WINNING HAND

ON the evening after his conference with Jack Lorton, when Bryce Carroday found Estelle Sidol at the door of his room in the hotel, for a moment something in the pathos of her beautiful face, with its pleading blue eyes, went straight to his heart. The young lawyer was not a conceited man, but he knew without words what that look meant, and the knowledge brought him sorrow.

"Bryce, I want to talk with you for the last time; not here, of course, but somewhere that is perfectly conventional." Mrs. Sidol's modesty and reserve were also perfectly conventional.

"There are pleasant corners in the refreshment rooms. Let's go down and have an ice," Bryce suggested.

The two found a secluded place easily, where the passing crowd would protect but not disturb them.

"I won't keep you long, Bryce. The general is out for a couple of hours with your senior member. We will not be bothered by him. I am going to speak plainly now."

Mrs. Sidol smiled sweetly as she looked up into the young man's face, and that pervading graciousness that made her so dangerous was entrancing to-night. Few men had ever been able to resist this fair woman's smile.

"I am interested in knowing what you have to say," Bryce responded, courteously.

"You know, of course, that I never wanted a divorce from General Sidol." The woman paused.

"I understood that the general was pushing that," Bryce replied.

"And you know that I never cared a fig for your friend Jack Lorton. We had a harmless little flirtation. He knew all along that I wasn't in earnest. I had some trouble getting rid of him, it is true, but I think I am through with him now," Mrs. Sidol went on.

"Yes," Bryce assented, dryly.

"I came out to Colorado with General Sidol for a special purpose."

There was another pause. Mrs. Sidol's violet eyes were on her plate, but the sweep of the long lashes, the exquisite curve of the red lips, the drooping waves of golden hair, all were bewitching. It was never necessary for this woman to add artifice to nature. Her beauty was genuine, dainty, alluring. Men could denounce her in her absence who found resistance impossible in her presence. When she spoke again her voice was low, clear, and very earnest.

"Bryce Carroday, once in a lifetime a woman loves with all her heart. Outside of this all is dust and ashes, mere vanity, longing for power, need for increased funds at her command, maybe, need for excitement, pastime. Oh, there are endless reasons why women play at loving, but the real thing is deep, tremendous, imperishable."

Bryce was leaning forward to catch her low words, when Mrs. Sidol looked up suddenly, and again he read her full meaning in her eyes.

"We are separated now by conventional barriers, though only the width of the table is between us here. Conventions do not count with the heart, and I shall always love you, Bryce Carroday. Because I am married I can tell you this. I can say everything I want to say. You do love me. I know you do."

No free man is more helpless than he to whom a pretty woman says: "You do love me. I know you do." It may be easy enough to be virtuously brave away from her, but with her—the human side of life is insistently strong. One instant of hesitation, only one, lay between the words and the reply, in this gently wooing hour. But through that instant swept the memory of a boyhood love, a pledge of faith, the dream on battlefields of a home building that was waiting for him, the solace of long hours in the hospital, the cruel deception as to his escape from death that broke a father's heart and left a lonely girl the plaything of this

selfish woman. In that one instant Estelle Sidol awaited the fulfillment of the overwhelming desire of her soul. In it Bryce Carroday found solid ground for his feet.

It was a crucial moment in the lives of both, and the beautiful woman there never knew how near to victory she was when defeat met her.

"I would not willingly wound you, Mrs. Sidol, but the woman whom I can love truly, deeply, everlastingly, as men love only once, will never need to ask me about it. I'll make it known to her so surely she cannot doubt it." Bryce's voice was dangerously deep. "She may be a divorced woman. I've seen too much of law and of life to condemn any man or woman for a separation under many circumstances, but there'll be nobody for me to dodge because by his legal right he could kick me into the street."

A cry of anguish from Mrs. Sidol's lips. It was her hour of retribution and there was no strength within her to meet its bitterness.

"Bryce! Bryce!" The wail of a crushed and bleeding heart was in that call. "I saved your life. I wonder what for."

"I don't know what it was for. I don't know why I am here when the soil of France is vitalized with America's best red blood. I don't know why you are rich and winning and beautiful, and the chambermaid here has a birthmark that makes her homely. I don't read the mysteries of the uni-

verse. I read only Bryce Carroday's duty and try to make him follow it. I have known sorrow and suffering and disappointment and loss; but I have never walked the crooked ways; I have kept a clean hand for my fellow men, an admiration for beauty and culture and unselfishness in women. I don't count big. You'd better have let me go down in the sea. I'll do it sometime, somewhere, and never be missed. I do not fit your scheme of life. The sooner we understand each other the happier we will be. If I am brutally frank in all this, I have no wish to be anything but truthful."

Bryce leaned back, the flush of earnestness on his face more becoming than he knew. Mrs. Sidol also leaned back and dropped her spoon beside her plate. Hers was intense nature, and her love for this man was selfish, overwhelming, imperishable. Out of that kind of love grows an imperishable hatred.

"I may really love only once, but I shall never consent to be scorned, and *I play no losing game.*" The voice was low and clear and the face was calm; but in the blue eyes there was a consuming fire. "Your firm will secure General Sidol's claim to his property. The divorce suit will not proceed in New York City. General Sidol will never get to make love again to that insipid little Mrs. Edward Sidol, his nephew's wife. She will drag along as a poor man's wife, and fade out taking care of twin

babies. It runs in the Sidol family—twins. Leslie Jannison will never marry your friend Jack Lorton. One of these days he will come back to me for comfort. Many men have done that before. You cannot prevent his coming. And that cousin of his, the old maid, who rents apartments for a living, what are such women made for?"

Bryce Carroday frowned and bit his lip. That shaft had hit home. But for once Estelle Sidol had lost control of herself, and, having let go her hold, she knew no stopping place.

"As for you, Bryce Carroday," the red lips quivered in real agony, "you have scorned me, but what have you to turn to? You have deceived your law partners in trying to secure the loss of this suit. I have the proof. You will be compelled to leave your firm now—the general will see to that, and what he leaves undone his wife will finish. You will be a poor lawyer, beginning at the very bottom again. *I play no losing game.* That's all. Let's go upstairs."

"One minute, Mrs. Sidol. I take no issue with your predictions. As for myself, I may be poor, though not exactly in the soup line yet; and, as you say, I may have to begin again out of favor with my present legal associates. But I'll be on mighty good terms with myself, and that's a thing you can't buy and sell in any market. Shall we go upstairs?"

Mrs. Sidol hesitated. Hers had been a life of

winning. She was an ungracious loser, and, for all her words, not quite ready to surrender. And while she had trifled with many men's affections, and had thoroughly enjoyed the admiration of many, she would have bartered her soul for the love of the man before her now. She had one last card yet to play.

"Bryce, I have one friend you will never care to meet. You do not know him, but he knows you, and he will keep me informed of all you do. You have never seen him, and yet he plays the biggest part of all in this case of Sidol *versus* Sidol that you are trying to block at every turn, and *he holds the winning card.* As he moves, you win or lose. *And he moves as I direct.* As you have said, General Sidol was the one who pushed that divorce matter. And he meant to push it to the end, leaving me entirely cut off from this rich increase of fortune, even after I had gotten rid of my two sons by their aunt legally adopting them. I tried to get you to use your influence, and I tried to get Jack Lorton to use his influence on you, to have the divorce stopped. You both failed me, but I have still this unfailing resource that puts into my hands the power to decide the lawsuit with one word from me. It brought General Sidol to my feet and the divorce case was dropped in a moment. I am absolute mistress of all this affair now. You may doubt my word, but it will be a foolish doubter who

does that. I am only a poor, unloved woman, but I still rule the destinies of many."

Angry, vengeful, crushed, loving still, willing to go to the last limit to win, determined to destroy to the last limit in defeat, Estelle Sidol was never more alluringly beautiful than at this dramatic moment. Only a strong man could face such danger calmly. Bryce Carroday was a strong man.

"You mean that little man who posed so successfully as civil engineer, real-estate agent, house servant, what you will? Yes, I do know him. He is the cleverest poser I ever saw. If he disguised himself he would be found out at once, but because he goes right out in the open from one thing to another he escapes. He's a shrewd fellow in more ways than one, though, Mrs. Sidol. A dog that fetches also carries, remember. Don't pin your faith to him. He isn't worth it, even if he is an industrious cuss and has served you well so far. This has been an extremely unpleasant meeting, Mrs. Sidol. Let's forget it if we can. Personally, I would do you any favor possible. If I have been the means of making you unhappy, I wish to Heaven I could make it up to you in some way. On your own confession, you mean to make things uncomfortable for me and you feel justified in your action. You may succeed to a degree. But for your own sake don't hate too far. That sort of thing eats into the hater and drains the sweetness out of the soul. I know, be-

cause I have fought the beast myself and haven't always won. Will you have another ice? It isn't late yet."

Mrs. Sidol rose abruptly, without making any reply. For the first time in her career of power she had failed, and she knew it.

When she reached General Sidol's suite of rooms the door was opened for her by her little henchman. She went at once to the parlor and threw herself into a cushioned chair. Her fists were clenched, her fine features were drawn and white, her blue eyes were ablaze with an insane anger. Estelle Sidol, in that hour, fully verified the poet's line,

Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.

The small man had followed her into the parlor and stood beyond the center table, looking down at her.

"Mrs. Sidol." He spoke in a low tone.

"What are you in here for? Why do you follow me? I am tired. I want to be alone—alone." The voice was piercingly shrill.

"You lost the game, then? This was your last play."

The question came slowly.

"I never lose. Oh—" The woman wrung her hands in anger. "I tell you I never lose."

"You don't? Of course you don't. But—I hold the winning card for you. We may as well settle our account to-night."

The little man's dark face seemed to grow darker as he stood still beside the table, a mere splotch on the room's elaborate furnishings. Mrs. Sidol sat up and stared at him. He had been her tool, her willing man-of-all-trickery, in every movement. He had never asked for more than the mere chance of serving at her command. He had offered himself, for a price, it was true, but the price had been paid fully, unhesitatingly. He had been in her eyes a well-made machine that never missed a stroke. Mrs. Sidol spoke her honest conviction when she said to Bryce Carroday, "He moves as I direct." It had never occurred to her that this man she had for the convenience of the moment called her friend could think of moving except under her direction. He could efface himself from any map so easily, it was inconceivable that he could not also be effaced at will. The possibility of it began to dawn upon the woman now. She had no wiles for such a creature. Men must be rich, handsome, and infatuated with her who demanded her efforts to hold them in her vassalage. This man was none of these. He had been abundantly paid for his services. No duty given him had carried any especial personal risk to himself. He was merely a useful part of her system. He must be reduced to his place at once. She had much need for his line of service now.

"I do not understand you. I have no unpaid

account with you. I tell you I am tired and I want to be alone. When I need you I will call you."

The woman turned her beautiful head wearily on the chair cushion, but her hands did not unclench. The light of the lamp illumined the wavy glory of her golden hair and enriched the tones of her handsome gown. Her profile on the dark-green cushion was like a cameo in its clear-cut lines.

The little man still stared across at her, unconscious of her beauty, unimpressed by the allurement that had enthralled so many men.

"When you call me I may not hear. I tell you I settle this to-night. Then I leave the West for good."

The tone was dull, definite; the tone of one who has reached the end of one leading, who would change his associates, not his line of action. Life to him was controlled always by the "something for nothing" policy.

"Name your sum and go, then. I'm through with you." Mrs. Sidol spoke precisely as she had spoken to her cowering children on the night they had interrupted her interview with Jack Lorton in her apartment in New York City. She did not even turn her head to look at the man she was addressing.

"I want your check for ten thousand dollars to-night. I'll hold it till eleven o'clock to-morrow

morning. You will redeem it with the cash then—"

Mrs. Sidol sprang up.

"I hold the winning card. You pay me or I go to Jane Kilwarth—"

"Jane Kilwarth!" Mrs. Sidol exclaimed.

"Your first husband's sister, the old maid who has adopted your two boys, *legally*."

Estelle Sidol laughed half hysterically, overwrought by the stress of the evening's events.

"This is blackmail. I'll call the police. I'll report you at once. General Sidol will have you in jail inside of an hour," she declared, excitedly.

"You want to call him here? *I hold the winning card.*"

The man's voice was still dull of sound.

"But why go to Jane Kilwarth? She has only the means the children's father left them. Little enough, as I know too well. She cannot do one thing for you, you blackmailer."

"Will you do one thing for me—*the* one thing?" the man asked.

Mrs. Sidol was her determined, dominant self again. She must not lose her tool now when her hardest task lay still ahead.

"I will not. You will leave here now. Come to me at ten to-morrow morning. Here, mind you. I will have important work for you to do then. Don't fail me. You understand? I'm tired. Oh, I'm crushed, wretched, lost, to-night. Don't

stand there. Leave me and come to-morrow, I tell you. The salary is the same, of course, but go."

"I will go. But I will not come to-morrow. You played your last trump. *I still hold the winning card.*"

And the man was gone.

. . . . . .

The next day Bryce Carroday asked to be released from a partnership in the firm in order that, so far as he was officially concerned, he might have no further connection with the case of Sidol *versus* Sidol, at the same time reminding his associates of the agreement to await the official report of John Fairborough Lorton before final action be taken in the proceedings. Then he started on the trail of the man to whom he had warned Estelle Sidol not to pin her faith, a need for him having suddenly developed in the young lawyer's business.

XVI

A FORGOTTEN HOMELAND

"IF any fortune teller had ever told me I'd take a journey with a fair man, I'd know it meant you, 'Peter Rabbit.' But if they'd gone on to say we'd go in a Pullman compartment, right up next to pure reading matter, clear from New York to New Mexico, I'd know the cards was stacked." So Janis Gwin commented as she lolled comfortably in her berth.

"You mean next to 'Big Sister's' cousin and his cousin's cousin. That is, they're in Drawing-room A, and we're in Compartment B," "Peter Rabbit" responded.

"Uh-huh. Only, between us two it's going to be 'Miss Cid' and 'Miss Leslie' from now on. And we'll quit this 'cousin's cousining' right here. Sounds too much like that chapter in the Bible where 'Abraham forgot Isaac, and Isaac forgot Jacob,' and so on. But, Golly! ain't we gettin' somewhere, now?"

The train had climbed the Glorietta Mountains with its great engines straining at every bolt, and,

having breathed a minute on the top of the world, was plunging down into the wildly picturesque Apache Cañon.

"Some country!" "Peter Rabbit" said, as he watched the landscape swim upward and vanish in the heights behind them.

"Them pretty little mountain knobs back in old York State are what you call sonnets to this here. It's blank verse, like Milton's 'Paradise Lost' that 'Big Sister' kept along with his books on higher mathematics. It's as different from back home as geometry is from 'findin' the gain or loss, and how much,' in them tough little problems in profit and loss in the eighth-grade Arithmetic. Remember 'em? Wonderful old America, to be so big and *variegated.* What are we stoppin' here for? Maybe the engine got dizzy."

There was a lull of train noises. "Peter Rabbit" leaned wearily back in his seat with his head against his pillow. Janis closed her eyes a moment. From Drawing-room A her ear caught the sound of Cid Jannison's voice, clear and low. She was humming an old tune, now breaking into a line of song, now dropping back into soft, wordless sounds:

"Though the heart be weary, sad the day, and long,
Still to us at twilight comes Love's old song,
Comes Love's old sweet song."

Purple shadows were beginning to fill the upper cañons, while the lower valleys were pulling folds

of silvery mists about their shoulders. But overhead the blue skies of New Mexico were full of light, and all the mountain peaks were edged around with sunset gold.

"I wonder if anybody 'll ever write the Real American Novel, like I've always joked about, with all the different folks and places in it," the young wife said, musingly. "Miss Cid, she's New York apartment. That's one kind of a home. Ours is another, only it ain't a home at all; but we had daddy there. And Miss Leslie's pretty old farmhouse up in New England is still another kind. New York, New England, and now what's New Mexico got? Seems like a new heaven and a new earth, when it comes to breathin', don't it, dearie? America's awful wide, but I s'pose the same things is needed in every old corner of it. I hope pretty Miss Leslie finds that out some day. Don't you?"

But her husband had fallen asleep, his thin, chalky face dull against the pillow behind his head. He had made a brave fight uncomplainingly as long as his wife had employment in the city, lulling her anxiety and reducing her expenditure of sympathy on himself. But when the opportunity for a change of climate came thus unexpectedly to the Gwins, the sudden relaxation from the strain of the days, with the coming realization of a thing hitherto undared to hope for, even in dreams, the props gave way, the false strength vanished, and

the man's real condition became apparent. "Peter Rabbit" had need for pure air and sunshine. How much need the loving Janis had never comprehended until this journey began. Every mile of it made her heart swell with gratitude for the opportunity it promised at the end.

And, best of all, it was Leslie who directed every movement, Leslie who paid all the bills and planned ahead for everything. She had understood the sick man's case at the first glance, and she mentally increased her secretary's salary at once because of it. At once, too, her half-formed itinerary plans halted. But the sick man was not the only one of the four who needed care. His little wife must be built up if she was to do a worker's part in the future. And so, each of the quartet was faring to the far Southwest to gain a something fitted to the differing need of each.

Leslie had heard much of Albuquerque, both in France and in her work in New York City. It was far from home. It was neither South nor West nor Middle, but some of all these points, a sort of haven to the girl's imagination, not only for sick bodies, but for weary, longing minds. "Peter Rabbit" was to stay at least a month in Albuquerque in a quiet sanitarium. Janis was to be with him until he was comfortably adjusted to his place —another of the wonderful experiences which were crowding the hours of this little office girl in this wonderful journey into a new land. As soon as it

was best for her to leave her husband she would join Cid and Leslie, and the three would explore the region within easy hail of Albuquerque. Whatever seemed best following this would be taken up at the end of the month.

Meanwhile a new world seemed opening up to the two Eastern cousins as they came for the first time to the old town of Santa Fe. The little "City of the Holy Faith" lay wrapped in the summer sunshine, quaint, hoary with age, its very atmosphere teeming with legend and the memories of deeds that made its story dramatically tragic half a century before Pocahontas had saved John Smith on the Virginia frontier, or Boston town had been conceived, or Plymouth Rock had become the doorstep of the homeland in the unknown wilderness. The air above the place hung crystal clear, and round about the wide valley of the Santa Fe River the mesa heights and mountain peaks surged, dim and misty, through lavender distances—Sandia and Sangre de Christo, Jemez and Ortiz, gigantic, immovable, unconquerable; but, with the changing kaleidoscope of sky line and manifold tintings, never, through the countless days of slow-moving centuries, returning to the eye the same picture of the day before.

The city itself was a dreamland; its annals a palimpsest in the volume of America's onrushing record, to Cid and Leslie Jannison, trained as they were in all the *Mayflower* lore, versed in the story

of New York from the New Amsterdam of Peter Stuyvesant to the Bronx of Theodore Roosevelt. And they reveled in the historic riches of this quaint old settlement in the heart of the sun-kissed valley of the Rio Santa Fe. They buried themselves in the old Palace of the Governors, facing the green, tree-shaded plaza in the center of the town. Its delight to the travelers was not alone in the museum of treasures it held, historic and barbaric relics, tokens of a dramatic past. The very walls of the long, low, adobe structure seemed sentient, guardians of the story of the great Southwest. Here Spanish rulers valiant behind the sword, devout before the crucifix, had trod the soil of the new America with all the haughty pride of fifteenth-century Europe. Here had ruled the pale-faced people of a harsher tongue and dominant breed, leaders of a wide-wandering stubborn folk who fight and colonize to the ends of the earth. Here had been written the matchless story of Ben-Hur, before the writer had ever seen the Holy Land of Palestine. Here had been foreign intrigue and native political trickery. The hand of justice and the sometime heart of mercy. And it was still the same old palace, long, low, imperishably built, with walls defying the appetite of ages.

The architecture of the city was appealing, too, in the simplicity of its native art, embellished by the faithfulness to decoration and design of the only

types that are truly American, not an Anglicized, nor Europeanized, modification of importation.

Leslie and Cid walked the narrow streets of the genuinely Mexican quarters, where the homes open only to admit the incomer; and all the home touches, the sunshine, the flowers, the places of pastime, the apartments of service, belong to and come through the inner court, the patio, hidden from the public way.

They climbed to the ruined walls of old Fort Marcy, where, long ago, dominant hands had planted the American flag and built up a defense about the staff, that those in the city below might only lift their eyes to know who held the ruling grip, which neither numbers nor cleverness nor savage outbreak could ever loosen again.

The two young Easterners reread the story of the old Santa Fe Trail, and found the stone-marked corner where its long, long winding had ended. They sat in the ancient church house, first altar in the wilderness in a day forgot, a place still fashioned and furnished as in the early days of its holy office. They stood beside the slowly crumbling ruin of the old Spanish prison, La Garita, the blind wall where human eyes looked grimly on a brown dull space—the last of earthly things the condemned would look on in this life.

"Is this America or Spain? Do we dream, or are we awake, Cid?"

Leslie asked the question as the two sat on the

veranda of the hotel and thought of the day when De Vargas came with power into the open plaza and reconquered the Indian stronghold, baptizing with water what he had converted with powder.

"It's a part of our bigness, Les," Cid replied. "See the Stars and Stripes above the Statehouse, and note the Red Cross cards in the humble little shacks where the English tongue is never spoken. Loyalty and Christian helpfulness. It is for all and all, our own America. In the shadow of the Woolworth tower or hemmed in by the Boston Common, I must tell you again, we don't quite realize our size and 'infinite variety.' It is good for us to be here. I hope Janis will get in to-morrow."

"She will be sure to come," Leslie replied. "What next?"

"We go for a two weeks' camping trip up northwest in the Frijoles Cañon, the place of the ancient cliff dwellers of a forgotten homeland, older by some scores of centuries than all this. It is alluring as to description, fabulously rich in prehistoric resources, restful, retired from the onrush of the crowd, a good place to go to stop and catch up with oneself. There is a camp in a little cañon—as New Mexico terms go. Nothing is really little here to me. The custodian of this part of the National Forestry Reserve presides over the place. From end to end it offers a world of interest. Nature, they tell me, did tremendous things up

there. And the old, vanished races of men and women, made in the image of God, like us two Jannisons, lived and progressed and perished there. We'll go and read their life story in the work of their hands that hasn't perished yet. It belongs to the beginnings of our big America. We who come out of New England homesteads a century old can look on homesteads a hundred centuries old. My clothes begin to hang loosely on my shrunken frame. I'm not as big a woman as I thought I was back in New York City." Cid paused and looked out at the sunset coloring in the western sky.

"Oh, Ciddie, I'm an infant in swaddling clothes. I haven't even begun to walk or talk. I, who thought I had learned all Europe in my hospital days, don't even begin to grasp this yet. I am glad we came. I hope Janis is seeing this sunset to-night." Then the two talked of Janis Gwin and her adored "Peter Rabbit," and planned for the coming days when she would join them.

. . . . . .

On the third morning after Janis came to Santa Fe she stood at the edge of the shaded plaza, waiting for Cid and her cousin. They had just gone into the old Palace of the Governors for some more descriptive material of the Frijoles Cañon, some thirty miles away, whither the three were tending to-day for their fortnight's camping. The

journey thither would be made in a little touring car fitted for carrying tourists from Santa Fe to points of interest in the accessible vicinity.

"I didn't know anybody could be so happy this side of Jersey City, N. J.; and I didn't know there was so much sunshine this side of Kingdom Come," Janis said to herself. "I'd love to stay right here. Peter's doin' so well, and so sure he's goin' to get well, now— Why, good morning, old Baldy! How did you come to get right into the front yard, anyhow?"

Janis was looking off at the mountains whose gleaming crests and snowy ridges, billowing up between purple folds of shadowy cañons, seemed, in that rare altitude, to be marvelously near.

"Are you waiting for this car to Buckman, too?"

Janis turned to see a slender girl-woman standing beside the touring car. She was fair haired, with a white throat, full red lips, and eyes as blue as the New Mexico skies. Something in the expression of the young face, however, suggested a sort of troubled expectancy, as of one unready to meet a sure responsibility. Her hands were full of bags and bundles. Two little tots, hardly more than babies, clung to her gown. Janis looked her through quickly, the sharp eyes losing nothing.

"A good mother, but she don't know how. She oughtn't 'a' had 'em," was the swift conclusion.

"Yes, we're leavin' from right here at any time, now. Are you goin' that way, too?" Janis queried.

"Yes, and I would like to go with somebody, if I may, on account of the babies. They won't be much trouble, I'm sure. I have made all of my arrangements to leave this morning. My baggage is at the hotel," the stranger replied, hesitatingly.

"Uh-huh. I see. They're three of us, all womenfolks, and two-thirds of us, anyhow, loves babies; and the other third can do anything from runnin' a truck over Hun trenches to runnin' a maternity hospital in New York City. She knows how to take care of babies all right, so she couldn't help lovin' 'em sooner or later. Here's our crowd right now."

The shadow lifted from the young mother's face, and the little ones, letting go of her gown, came smilingly toward Janis Gwin with the quaint trustfulness of tiny childhood.

As the touring car with its driver and passengers left the corner of the plaza, Janis Gwin caught sight of a man standing in the shadow of a supporting column of the façade of the Palace of the Governors.

"The world's shrunk some since the last shower," the girl remarked, carelessly. "Yonder's a man I used to see hangin' round the elevator on Mr. Lorton's floor when Mr. Bryce Carroday was in New York City. Not much to look at, but you can't lose some folks more 'n you can a thievin' cat."

Each of the other three women gave a start,

and Janis, keen to the fact that she had struck something, studied them curiously through her eyelids. Cid and the stranger looked at each other involuntarily, with a sudden sense of nearness, inexplicable, unrecognized. Leslie's color deepened as she stared in the direction of the column.

"That little man was agent for a tenant of mine in New York not long ago. He's in the real-estate business," Cid declared.

"He was serving man at a dinner I attended early in May," Leslie insisted.

"And I knew him as a civil engineer up in Colorado. I saw him in my husband's office once or twice in April," the young mother asserted.

What Bryce Carroday had told Cid of Mrs. Sidol's tool that day on Gray Cliff came to her mind with these declarations, giving one more line of service for this "tool."

Janis grinned mischievously.

"The all-American type for my next novel," she thought. "We got one common bond. Everybody's mutual friend. Nobody immune except the kiddies here," she declared aloud, and all barriers between the stranger mother and the Eastern travelers were down at once.

"I am Miss Jannison of New York City," Cid explained. "This is my cousin, Miss Leslie Jannison of—"

"New England," Leslie put in.

"Anywhere she is needed," Cid went on, with a smile. "And this is Mrs. Gwin."

"Man Friday and excess baggage," Janis insisted, with the old saucy flirt of her head.

"Maid of all help, maid of honor," Leslie declared. "We couldn't have come without her. We are touring for a change of climate and a study of America. My cousin and I are interested in sociological work."

"And I am interested in 'my cousin and I' for 'Big Sister's' sake," Janis added, mentally.

"I am Mrs. Edward Sidol. It isn't a common name."

Cid and Leslie exchanged glances quickly. Uncommon as it was, neither one would ever make inquiry to find if there might be any relationship between Edward Sidol and the general back in New York.

"These are my twin babies, Teddy and Joyce," the young mother continued. "I hope they won't trouble you. They will be sleepy soon. I am going to the Frijoles Cañon to stay for a few days while my husband is in this part of the country on business. We will join him soon and go home together. Do you know anything about this cañon?"

"Not very much," Cid replied. "We have never been West before. I understand it is a deep little gash in the Pajárito Plateau, the ancient home of some prehistoric cliff dwellers. It is a part of the

National Forestry Reserve. The custodian of this part of the Reserve has a ranch house in the cañon and there are full equipments for camping. Tourists are coming and going almost daily. That is all I know. You don't live in New Mexico, then?"

"No. My home is in southern Colorado, not far from Alamosa, but I have never been down here. We are often in Denver," Mrs. Sidol explained. Then, with just a shade of hesitancy, she asked, "Do you know Bryce Carroday of Denver?"

Only Janis Gwin, whom nature must have meant to be a detective, inherently curious, and with every nerve alert, noted this faint hesitancy, and Mrs. Sidol was added to her list of things, none of her business, that would bear looking into.

"Was Cid waiting for Leslie to answer that question? Cid hesitated a bit, herself, anyhow. Why should she? More material for the Great American Novel, by J. Gwin of New York. Uh-huh."

"Mr. Carroday is an old college chum and a dear friend of a cousin of mine, Mrs. Sidol. They visited each other in New York City recently. I met him in my home, and we all four spent a week-end in Cousin Leslie's home up on the Connecticut. Do you know him?"

The face of the young mother was very pale, as a face grows pallid from physical pain. Cid was

adjusting the fastening of her hand bag and did not look up. Leslie was watching a train of burros loaded with firewood, winding down a narrow trail toward the main road. But Janis Gwin's sharp eyes scrutinized the situation carefully.

"Somebody's got a real ache—two of 'em, maybe. Here's a new doing. Can't have any more cases on my hands. I'll change the subject for them," the girl concluded, as she exclaimed:

"Look at Joyce, Mrs. Sidol. She's holding your purse so cunning."

Joyce's smile was bewitching and her blue eyes were full of happiness. Who can be uncomfortable when a child is glad? Everybody began to talk about Joyce, and Janis had saved the day.

The sleepy Sidol babies were held in the laps of the grown-ups by turns. But it was Cid who held them the longest, and with the least signs of weariness.

So they journeyed up the cliff-skirted valley, with its sandy stretches and scant vegetation, till they reached the little railroad station of Buckman; they crossed the Rio Grande, with its yellow currents boiling viciously beneath them; then came the up-crawl to the Pajarito Plateau, with the winding way into and out of picturesque cañons, and the trail along the mesa top, to where the hither cliff of tufa rock drops hundreds of feet to the narrow valley of the Frijoles River below.

"Where do we go from here?" Janis sang out,

as the party left the touring car on the cañon's rim.

"Just naturally down this little trail. Follow me. That's all you got to do," the driver of the car replied, loading his arms with bundles and starting off sturdily down the narrow, precipitous way. "Carry all you can, and I'll come back for the rest. Everything left in the car 'll be safe. Nobody 'll see it till I get back. They's everything in the world in New Mexico but folks."

The children were the luggage impossible to be left five hundred feet above the bottom of the cañon. Cid and Janis had held them affectionately as they slept along the way, but it was Leslie who bore them most easily with sure foothold down the all but impossible trail; and it was Leslie to whom the little ones clung with an instinctive assurance of safety in the strong arms holding them so firmly.

"Oh, they're not as heavy as a wounded six-footer on the edge of a trench trying to tell me how to save him," the young Red Cross nurse called back as she swung away down the cliffside. "Wait there, Cid, till Janis gets here. I'll leave Teddy with her and come back for Joyce."

But little Joyce had cuddled up to "Mit Fid" from the first instant of meeting, and now Cid jealously held her close and clambered after the descending group.

And so they found their way to the pretty

ranch house and the little camping place on the floor of the valley.

The days in the Frijoles Cañon were full of delight to the Eastern travelers. Cid and Leslie had climbed the White Mountains and toured through the Adirondacks, but even to these two this was an undreamed-of world; while Janis Gwin, cliff dweller in a great walled-in city, explored the ancient homes of the real cliff dwellers with the joy of a discoverer. The place teems always with historic interest and romance, and withal it is so vast and marvelous and peaceful there.

Mrs. Sidol did no exploring. The Rocky Mountains were childhood memories for her; her children demanded much of her time; and inherently she was a timid woman of the clinging type who never walk alone. But her tent was near to the Jannison tent, and the occupants of the two tents were much together, with the children a constant interest and delight to all of them. There were other tents up and down the valley, while transient tourists dropped into and climbed out of the cañon almost daily.

On the third evening of their stay Cid and Leslie and Janis sat before their tent door, talking over the day's events, while little Teddy and Joyce Sidol tumbled about their knees or played together in childish joy. The day had been warm, but already the air was cool with the evening's

breath. And although the upper portion of the cañon was still in the sunlight, the little Frijoles River had lost its noonday sparkle. Across this stream the cañon wall whitened in the evening light. Its myriads of gaping caves were filled with black shadows, while endless rows of big black splotches along the lower reaches showed where, in some far-back day, cedar rafters must have rested that had upheld the roofs of countless homes. It was the day's most restful hour, and the three young women were beginning to feel the full influence of the camp's alluring call to calmness, and confidential seriousness and introspection.

"I thought Plymouth Rock was the oldest thing in America, except them Spanish settlements that were all massacred down Albemarle way," Janis Gwin said, staring at the honeycombed wall of tufa rock. "And I thought Indians out West didn't ever do anything but hunt and fish and scalp the whiteskins; nor ever live anywhere but in tepees made of the hide and hair of wild animals, nor wear any clothes but a turkey quill stuck in their back hair. Who were these folks that moved away from here? and when did they go? and where did they move to? The custodian was telling me today how they snuck back into the caves and built their houses in front of 'em somehow, high and high. And I went with him to that big round place he said they called Tuyonyi. Must have

been a circular thing like an engine roundhouse for about a thousand toy engines, big as wheelbarrows, with a little court inside. All that's left is just the cellars, walled in, like the basement of any old house place nowadays, only so little and cell-like they are. Hundreds of them, 'Custody' said. Looked like a million to me. Some apartment house in its day! And the folks that lived there knew how to build and do a lot of things in B.C. times. This old America is *one* country, for sure."

Cid looked thoughtfully out at the ancient dwelling places.

"It is a race forgotten of men," she said. "They lived and throve and fought and died as races of men are still doing. They cultivated this valley land; they quarreled and made up; they slew their enemies and died for their friends. Up and down this little Frijoles River lovers wandered on moonlight nights such as this one is going to be. These were their homes. They cut out those caverns in the sides of the cliffs for dwelling places, and in them babies were born. It is the same old story retold with every æon of time. They perished that something finer might come. Better little Teddy and Joyce, here, than the child of the flatter skull. Plymouth Rock is old and honorable, the corner stone of American freedom forever, but, after all, it seems to me now that it isn't so much America in the making as this

wonderful land is. It isn't sacrilegious to say that of the old Rock, God bless it! The thing it stands for, though, is an English graft, not an indigenous American plant."

Cid looked quizzically at Janis, whose face did not change, save for the ghost of a twinkle in her blue eyes.

"Uh-huh. An' they kept on graftin', all right-y. Biggest grafters on earth, I reckon. But where'd these folks here go to church? There's always been an altar in the wilderness, if tribes was the least bit smart, hasn't there?" Janis inquired.

"Oh, we are going there to-morrow," Leslie broke in. "Upstream nearly a mile and a straight up-climb of nearly two hundred feet to a wonderful cavern—the 'Ceremonial Cave,' they call it. What a place for worship!"

"But they worshiped there, and in their crude way it meant all to them that our cathedrals do to us. It is a tremendous study. I'm glad we came here," Cid joined in.

Janis sat looking silently out at the quiet valley. The river rippled over a bit of rocky bed, the top of the cañon wall was still gleaming in the last sunlight, while the band of blue sky overhead was swept across with wisps of lavender mist. The camp was settling down to the stillness of the wilderness. A golden moon would flood the cañon presently, making whiter walls and blacker shadows here than ever could be made on New

York City pavements or in New England orchards.

"I'm glad we came, too," Janis said at last. "I'm so happy here—when the mails come all right," she qualified.

"You had letters to-day?" Cid queried.

"Yes, one from New York. That's just business, though. I didn't hear from 'Peter Rabbit.' That means he's better."

A late bird, swooping up behind the tent just then, in passing threw a black shadow over the girl's face.

"It's such a big thing to get to see all this," Janis went on, thoughtfully. "'Cause it makes you *think* a lot of things you never did think about before. There's just a few *real things* in this world, seems to me; and we're all alike, mainly. The rest is just extry, and some of it's extry hazardous. There's always been fightings and dyings; and, too, there's always been lovers and homes and little children. The caves must have been made for them first, 'cause they have a right to be little children and to have a place to be in. Haven't they, Joyce?"

Janis kissed the rosebud mouth as she lifted the little girl to her lap.

"Maybe these folks let all the sickly ones an' the starvin' ones in the tribe look after these cave-rights, a good deal like they do in big cities back East now, and that's why they quit flourishin'

an' their nine-hundred-room apartment house, that 'Tuyonyi' thing, on the Riverside Drive, overlookin' the Frijoles, was to let. They didn't 'low children in it, an' they didn't have orphan asylums. We got to keep a cave somewhere for children if we are goin' to keep on bein' an America, and not just a graft, or a *disappearance*, like these 'gone-ones' here have done. Mr. Lorton said once— Somebody's gettin' sand in their eyes, but it isn't Joycie," Janis broke off suddenly and hugged the sleepy baby to her.

Leslie sat looking at the white tufa cliffs, with their black caverns wherein forgotten homes had perished centuries ago. But she was not seeing them. Before her was a vision of Gray Cliff on a May Sabbath, belonging, not to the dead past, but to the humanly real and now. And Jack Lorton, standing erect and handsome, with the sunset light on his face, was saying again:

"If it cannot be—this thing I want—you and our home and New England—then, as I have lived so I will keep on living, unafraid and unashamed, because, God helping me, my life shall be clean and my work true."

Where was he now? Would they always be "fur together," as Jimmie, in the country graveyard, had said? His name came oftenest to the lips of his office girl, always in an almost reverential way. But never before had her words suggested his living presence so clearly as they did this evening.

The coming of Mrs. Sidol for the children broke up the line of thought. The three companions had noted that the face of their new acquaintance was shadowed with the passing of the days. No word had come from her husband, and they had no way of helping her, save in a loving interest in the children. However unpleasant the association of her name might be to Cid and Leslie Jannison, this Mrs. Sidol impressed them only as a gentle, kindly little woman whose company increased the pleasure of their stay here.

"Miss Jannison, will you come over with me for a little while?" the young mother asked, as she led the sleepy tots to her tent.

Cid went at once, leaving Leslie and Janis together.

"Was I presumin' to say we're all alike, just now?" Janis asked. "I don't mean to be saucy."

When had Janis Gwin ever repented of being —saucy in New York City? Surely this climate of New Mexico has powerful qualities.

"You are right, Janis. We're all alike. What was it Mr. Lorton said? You didn't finish." Leslie's voice was low.

"I don't remember which, now. He said so many good things. I guess I had more chance 'n anybody to know his inside workin's. Office girls can't help that. An' I saw him tried to the limit. He never failed. He'd have loved to have a home

if anybody ever would, I'm sure. Did you ever know him very well, Miss Leslie?"

All innocently the query was put.

"Yes, pretty well, for a long time. He was so much with Cid."

"Uh-huh. Then you knew one right-angled, four-squared man. Say"—suddenly changing the line of talk—"do you remember that little shrimp we saw in Santa Fe, leanin' against a pillar by the plaza, our letter of introduction to everybody present? He come in here to-day and went out again. And about a half hour afterward there was another sort of funny man—not an Indian nor a white man, just a sort of fifty-fifty. He went trekkin' out, too."

"What of it?" Leslie asked. "Men come and go daily here."

"Nothin'. I just happened to notice fifty-fifty to-day because of a curious sort of a silver ring with a pretty opal set in it. I wouldn't mind havin' it myself. But if that little man gets too many jobs, he's bound to neglect some of 'em. Maybe he's neglectin' a chance to keep out of Sing Sing. Wherever he is, he'll up and go sometime, and never come back, unwept, unhonored, and maybe unhung. I can't say about that. But let's forget him. I'm too happy to be unhappy to-night. Let's take a walk."

And the two strolled away aimlessly up the cañon. It was a wonderful night, too beautiful to

be shut out by tent walls, too restful to be lost to eyes not yet drowsy. The cliffs were gleaming reaches of silver; now mottled with the inky blackness of ancient caves, now tall and rounded in pillarlike masses, unscarred by shadows, like the pipes of a vast cathedral organ played upon only by Titan hands. The little stream sparkled under the moon's rays or slipped down through leaf-darkened spaces. Only a nightbird's call far away broke the stillness of the valley.

The two women clambered round the masses of rock, and crossed and recrossed the river on the logs of the footpath, until they came to where a black cave mouth yawned in the side of the sheer cliff far above them.

"The 'Ceremonial Cave.' Here are the ladders. Shall we try climbing up there to-night, Janis?" Leslie asked.

"I'd do anything on a night like this. Seems like there will never be another cloud in that sky, nor another blue day for me," Janis declared. "Of course, I've got a worry or two till 'Peter Rabbit' is really well; but he's so much better; and, another worry, too, I got a letter in the mail to-day from New York, about a little property of daddy's that has got to be looked after. I don't quite understand it, but I know that Mr. Lorton will help me on that as soon as I can get word across to him. Yes. Let's climb. Golly!

It looks a tall way up, but I could climb to the moon to-night."

It was "a tall way up," a long, hard climb on ladder and bridgeway, but secure enough for the sure-footed. At last the two, panting and triumphant, reached the top and stood within the great "Ceremonial Cave," cathedral of a long-perished people. Black as it had seemed nearly eightscore feet below, all of it now, save where it burrowed deepest into the cliffside, was flooded with moonlight. And even the shadows along the innermost walls were alluring. For there is nothing to fear in the Frijoles Cañon, either of man or of beast. In the moonlight the view was magnificent. Below lay the valley with its one gashed and seamed rock wall softened by wooded slopes; while the white tufa cliffs of the other wall were bare and fantastic. Between lay the fertile open spaces, the bits of woodland, the picturesque rock masses, with the winding course of the river down the valley's length—a very dream of beauty. The cavern itself, like the quadrant of a huge hollow sphere, curving back into the rock, was wide open across its front to sun and moon and air. Its dry floor was of an ancient cement that had endured through centuries of time, while the story of the hands that put it there is lost in the dim converging ages that carry no record. Near the outer edge of the cave a huge kiva had been constructed. From

the hatch in its circular top a ladder led to the bottom of its deep, cisternlike interior, many feet below—the holy of holies of a forgotten priesthood.

Leslie and Janis sat down on the kiva's rim, to rest and to comprehend the place in which they found themselves.

"It seems like a consecrated spot still," Leslie said, thoughtfully, "this place so weird and once so sacred. I wonder if a vision of to-day could ever have come to the priests who looked down on that valley from this high altar and chanted morning and evening prayers, maybe, to the tribe below. They were a peaceful folk, and skillful, or they couldn't have made this place here."

"I don't see how they ever got in here the first time—whether they were dropped down from overhead or boosted up from below," Janis marveled. "And I am thinking about the folks down there, too, who looked up at this here. I'll bet a potato it looked awfully high and wonderful to them, and far away from their little heartaches and stomachaches, in the common everyday run of things. But I think if I'd lived then I'd rather, after all, been down there grindin' corn, with my little pappooses around me, than to have been up here, take it for every day in the year."

"But it is lovely to sit up here and look down on all this, with a peace in your heart, as those high priestesses may have sat here on many moonlit nights," Leslie said.

"I guess maybe if you didn't bring the peace up here with you you wouldn't find it after you got here. But how near to us those ancient folks do seem, after all—like it was just yesterday they were all here. Seems to me as if we are all just cave dwellers, anyhow, buildin' bigger and handier, as we know how to do it. Those little old folks did their best, I guess. I'm for 'em far as they went. And it is sweet up here. I believe I'd rather come by moonlight than by daylight, but I'll wait till there is sunshine in here before I go down the ladder into this kiva thing. It's 'most too spooky in this 'dim religious light' for me. I wonder if on nights like this these folks ever come back and watch this place they called theirs once. I think more about these things since daddy went away, and the other world ain't quite so far and so impossible with him and mother both there."

As Janis sat looking pensively down at the shadow-decked valley far below, Jack Lorton would never have known her for the little sharp-eyed, sharp-tongued "Live Wire" of the New York City office. The experiences of travel were deepening her mental grasp, and the daily association on a simple equality with two well-bred and very human American women was unconsciously reshaping her trend of thought.

"Janis, I believe it was because those below did look up here that they grew better and learned more," Leslie said, softly.

"Uh-huh. Maybe, too, when they had their eyes up here, they weren't so particular about what went on in the cave next door, the funny little codgers! Maybe the men wouldn't be lookin' out for political pulls to get soft jobs; and the women didn't go philanderin' round, thinkin' the flattery of some other woman's husband was sweeter 'n the cooin' and putterin' of their own little pappooses; and maybe, too, the priests was too far up to be preachin' about how the women dressed and ever'thing! But," Janis added, with the old mischievous twinkle in her eye, "it's fun to look sideways and watch folks, too, a bit. And I've seen a lot of good things that way that I might have missed if I'd went along the street with my eyes on the top of the Woolworth tower."

"You are a little philosopher and a real comforter, do you know that, Mrs. Gwin?" Leslie asked.

"Uh-huh. I learned it from Mr. Lorton, though, if I am either one," Janis declared.

"Shall I go down the ladder into this kiva alone, now, or shall we go back and comfort Cid for what she has missed up here?" Leslie changed the subject quickly, but there was a smile on her face.

Janis expected the change. She had come to watch for it at the mention of Jack Lorton's name, and she made a mental entry thereof for her own consideration. But for all and all, not in many

a day had these two, each in her own way, been so happy as they were to-night.

Down the long centuries the loves and hopes and longings of a vanished people seemed sounding to each a call through the silent beauty of the moonlit way, filling the young wife's heart with hope for her loved one, and the maiden's soul with a new belief in the bigness and goodness of the guiding power of destiny, a fuller assurance that the years to come, though lonely always, without one dear face and voice, would nevertheless be happy, fruitful years for her; and her heart was singing a new sweet song that did not yet rise to her lips.

XVII

HELPING THE HELPLESS

THE young mother who had asked Cid Jannison into her tent came directly to her cause.

"Miss Jannison, I want to ask you to help me. I don't know where else to go and you seem so kind," she began, looking up into Cid's sympathetic face. "My husband's uncle is trying to get all our property away from us on the claim of a division made between Mr. Sidol's father and himself. Edward's father is dead now, you see. As long as the property was of no value, General Sidol claimed there was no division provided for in Grandfather Sidol's will. Now it is developing, he claims that there was."

Briefly, then, but in fairness, the case of Sidol *versus* Sidol was told. And if the young Western woman was lacking in the initiative that marked the Jannison type, she was sincere and honest and sweetly lovable.

As Cid listened, she marveled at the strangeness of events; that she should meet and know here this young mother, into whose life trouble

was brought by the husband of the woman whom she and Leslie had known and disliked so much in New York City.

"You spoke of Mr. Carroday being your cousin's dear friend. He was a good friend of mine, too, once. We all thought for months that he was drowned, and everybody in Colorado, it seemed, mourned for him. I was married when he got back from France, and now he's with the firm that's trying to make paupers of us, for General Sidol's sake. I wouldn't feel so bad about it if we had no children, but—we love our babies so, and we don't want to have their inheritance lost."

The young mother paused. All dimpled and pink and sweet as only sleeping babes can be, the two lay on their little cot beside her.

"Miss Jannison, could you get your cousin, who is Mr. Carroday's good friend, to tell him how hard it will be for us? Maybe if Bryce understood that he wouldn't be so down on us. He isn't a hard-hearted man, naturally. It's just his business makes him so, I suppose."

Cid felt suddenly dazed and cold. This was the story she had already heard in part from Bryce Carroday. When she did not speak, Mrs. Sidol went on:

"I'll tell you something. I haven't seen Bryce since he came home from France. He and I were engaged once. He always called me 'Little Colorado.' I thought he was drowned and life

seemed so lonesome. Then I met Edward and after a while we were married. Edward always thought the world of Bryce, and I believe that if Bryce only knew how we feel he might pity us and help us some way, and not want to ruin us just out of spite. Could you help me this way, do you suppose?"

Still Cid did not reply—Cid, poised, helpful, able. When had her ready sympathy ever been withheld before? Her brain whirled now, and a pain that was agonizing gripped her heart. This young wife had been Bryce Carroday's betrothed. She had left him. He must still love her, and he was jealous of her husband, else he could not do this thing he was doing against her. Bryce!

Mrs. Sidol leaned over to cover the babies' feet, while Cid looked out at the cañon, all silver and ebony in the moonlight. Then she turned to the mother beside her and the real Cid Jannison, the woman she was, spoke.

"Mrs. Sidol, I don't know where my cousin is right now. I am afraid that before I could reach him this case will be settled. But I do know Mr. Carroday very well. I think that I can get word to him soon, and I will help you if I can."

The young woman gripped Cid's hand in gratitude.

"Oh, you are so good, and I know, somehow, that Bryce will listen to you. He can't be cruel when he understands it all, I'm sure. It just wouldn't

be Bryce Carroday if he was. Do you know, Miss Jannison, that, much as I love my husband, there isn't anybody in the world I could trust to do his whole part like I could trust Bryce. That's why I have felt so crushed over this. Edward was coming down to meet a man somewhere who could help us some way, and then he was to meet me here. He hasn't come yet. If anything happens to him, could you help me? I feel so despondent, so full of dread to-night."

Cid put her arm about the younger woman and patted her shoulder comfortingly.

"Don't dread anything," she said, softly. "The ways of life are strange, but we can always trust. Whatever I can do for you I will do gladly. I'll write to Mr. Carroday to-night. You've had a busy day. Go to sleep now, and don't worry."

Mrs. Sidol looked up at her comforter, tall, gracious, sure.

"Miss Jannison, I don't know why I feel so, but from the minute I saw you in Santa Fe I felt as if I could trust you more than any other woman in the world; like I trusted Bryce once—and would trust him now—to be my best friend, if General Sidol's wife hadn't told me what she did about him."

So the elder Mrs. Sidol had gotten in her work here. That might yet account for many things and Cid was glad for this bit of information. She would withhold judgment until the full extent of

Estelle Sidol's part in the matter was understood. Her mouth grew suddenly stern, but her voice was gentle.

"If you trust me, then believe me when I say you can trust Bryce Carroday not to harm one golden hair of your babies' heads. I'll go now and write the letter. Good night."

In her own tent Cid Jannison sat face to face with herself. Suddenly she knew all the meaning of the sharp agony of that hour. Bryce Carroday had loved this pretty little woman. Was Bryce the unworthy thing that his actions in this lawsuit seemed to declare him? Cid was not ready to believe that yet. A thousand things might disprove his having any part in the effort to impoverish the happy Sidol family. Cid smiled at her own weakness in being willing to find excuse for him. But—did Bryce still love this "Little Colorado," the mother of Edward Sidol's twin babies? He had been too frank and fair and fine for her to doubt him on hearsay in a minute. Yet men in business and men in society are so frequently not one and the same; and after all, it was this man's words, not his deeds, that she really knew. Oh, that way lay heartbreak for Cid Jannison. She knew it now, knew that she had not given up with the ending of her own early dream; had not, as she so often affirmed to herself, found all her romance and her happiness in the romance of Jack Lorton and Leslie Jannison.

Why had she never thought of this before? The revelation that might have been sweet to her brought only bitterness now. Bryce had never acted like a lover, had given her no cause for thinking he cared any more for her than for any other woman. He was Jack's friend and she was Jack's cousin. That was all. *That was all.*

Leslie and Janis were still up the river somewhere in the moonlight. Early as it was, the camp was still. Cid came outside, for the tent seemed like a tomb. Just then a shadow fell across the doorway and she turned to see Bryce Carroday himself standing beside her. As she caught her breath and stood staring in surprise at this sudden appearance, Bryce offered her his hand, saying:

"Don't scream. I'm harmless. How do you do, Miss Cid?"

"Bryce Carroday, I ought to scream or faint, only I wasn't built for those things. How did you get to this place? Sit down."

Cid returned his handclasp cordially, and, offering him a seat before the tent, drew a camp chair opposite to him. She did not deny to herself the gladness that his presence brought. In her heart she knew now that she had not doubted his manliness, for all the suggestive evidence that her neighbor had just given her. His presence made her sure of him, and she told herself that her joy now was because she had not really doubted

his goodness—that was all. He must still care for the one he had no right to think of now. At least he did not care for herself. Cid was sure of that, and, trying hard to believe that, she was ready to accept the situation calmly.

"Leslie and Janis are mooning up the cañon somewhere. They'll be here very soon," Cid explained.

"I hope not too very soon, for I came to see you on particular business. I don't need Leslie, and especially I don't need little sharp-eyed Janis Gwin right now," Bryce declared, good-naturedly. "As to your question," he continued, "I came on a pony over from Buckman, and I rode down that one-hoof, narrow-gauge trail that winds from the top of that cliff clear to the bottom. Don't look incredulous. I'm a native son of Colorado. We know a lot about perpendiculars out here. I am going back to Buckman before the moon sets to-morrow morning, and on down to Santa Fe soon afterward. You will understand soon why I am leaving, and I don't believe you will criticize me for it. I'd like to stay longer, though. It is good for a man's soul to get into a place like this." Bryce breathed deeply. "The place isn't the only thing that is good for a man's soul here. Please let me say that first, Cid, because it won't stay unsaid; and then I'll take up the business of the meeting."

"It is human to be pleased with compliments,"

Cid said, smiling frankly. "I didn't know that you knew just where we were. I hadn't the itinerary well enough in hand to send you word. I'm listening for the business of the meeting first, though."

"Did you know that I was in Santa Fe when you were there, and just missed you, somehow? I got on track of you and sent a fellow up who came to peek over the rim and see if you were here and who was with you. I had to be careful, for reasons. I saw him at Buckman this evening, and got his pony and came over myself. And here I am. I have come for help. I think people must stand in line at your door, waiting their turn for the same purpose. I'm glad I'm at the head of the line to-night," Bryce declared.

"Oh, you are really second to-night, but go on. I want to be first at your door, presently," Cid said.

"It is a long story and one not interesting to a woman like you, but it must be told to get to the present need," Bryce began.

Then clearly, sincerely, omitting nothing essential, after a truly legal fashion, the young lawyer told the story of the case of Sidol *versus* Sidol. Cid, who had heard the same story not an hour ago, listened to this second version with an intense eagerness, and the picture of the gentle little mother in the tent not far away was before her as she looked at her visitor.

"This girl, now Edward Sidol's wife—'Little

Colorado,' I always called her—was my first sweetheart," Bryce said, frankly. "I think I deified her when I was overseas. We American boys had need for high ideals and fine memories. When I came home and found her married, I believe my disappointment was not so much in the loss of her as in the loss of my ideal of her. But that is now a finished chapter in my life, with no thought of bitterness, nor embarrassment, in the memory of it. Most of us close such doors behind us by the time we are thirty, I suppose."

"I think we do, and learn another sort of happiness afterward that fits some of us better, maybe," Cid said, gently.

Her face was in the full light, while Bryce's was in the shadow. As he looked at the woman before him he recalled the beautiful, dangerous face of Estelle Sidol in the cozy, dim-lighted corner of the hotel refreshment room, and the air of the little cañon grew sweeter and purer in the contrast.

"To understand just why I am here to-night I think I had better go back a little," Bryce said, taking up again the purpose of his appearance in the Frijoles Cañon. "The day after Jack came back to Denver to give his report on the property boundaries, I asked to be released from my association with the law firm and severed any further legal connection with the Sidol case through it. I knew by Jack's report to me that the case was lost

to Edward Sidol, as it stood, and I wanted to be free to work out the right thing, that I felt hadn't been found yet. And truly, I hoped that this right thing would save Edward's property for himself and his little family. So I started to run down the man who holds the winning card in this game. You cannot always judge by the outside. This little inconsequential cuss promises, after all, to be the real villain in this drama of the mountains. For it is a drama—a real life tragedy—that out-Herods Herod in the fiction dramas. I found him easily enough, and could have had him—for a price. That sort of investment is always pure wildcat. He did sell a map to a friend of mine that he pretended was of great value. It came into my hands for nothing, and was worth just that—nothing. I'd rather have him following me than snooping along beside me. But I have his measure sure now. He has the old Indian up in a wild cañon here scared half to death about lawyers and military men. That puts General Sidol and myself out of the running. This old fellow knows a lot about the old mine owner, Edward's grandfather. Also, I am sure he has some old papers hidden somewhere—he gives out they are lost—and all this is vital in this case. My notion is that the cunning redskin is playing for time, but, as he holds all the trumps, notions do not count. I got in touch with a half-breed, named Joe, down here, who was the Indian's trusted man

till recently. Joe was sent to Denver to tell Little Tool to come down here. I don't know if that man has any name; he has no use for one; 'ashes to ashes' on his tombstone will fit his case. As I say, this half-breed Joe was to tell this little Nothing to come down at once and meet the Indian. Joe took the message all right, but Little Tool sends two Mexicans in his stead (pretending, of course, it was Joe who did the sending) to overpower the Indian and get his strong box and, in a word, put all the trumps as well as the winning card in said Tool's hand. Your cousin's old college chum happened to be among those present just at the right time to shoo the Mexicans away; they were a couple of scary little fellows, and if he hadn't been a lawyer he might have finished the thing that day. But I kept a hold on Half-breed Joe and managed to square him with the old thoroughbred again. That little Nothing had given him a ring as a sort of bribe, pretending it had some significance. Joe is taking it up to the old Indian. Nothing to it, anyhow. Joe was the man I sent in here to-day. He will keep me informed of every motion till this is settled. But I'm getting ahead of the hounds. It is a long story and I don't want to tire you." Bryce paused.

"And an intensely interesting one. As Janis would say, 'More stuff for the Great American Novel I'm goin' to write.' Go on," Cid urged, eagerly.

"Here's the next chapter, then: Before Jack was to turn in his report and start for the Coast, as he had planned, he came down to New Mexico to wheedle the Indian into telling Edward Sidol all he knows. He succeeded. Only it is the white squaw who must be told. Well, here's the result: The Indian will come down to an old sheep herder's hut a short way upstream from the station and meet Edward's wife to-morrow, said white squaw being very essential in the case. Will you go with her to this place and wait till her husband, who will come later, gets there? There is no danger at all. It is not far from the station. The agent and Half-breed Joe will be there, and tourists coming up here to-morrow will be passing in and out at the station. The Indian may be a little late getting in, too. It is all a shifty, twisted matter, and must be carefully managed, but the result will mean everything to the Sidols. Our Sidols, I mean. Some one must go with 'Little Colorado' to-morrow. If you have been with her three days you know she is not the kind of woman to go anywhere alone. Explain everything you think she should know on the way. You can get back here to-morrow evening. After all I have told you you can see why I do not wish to be recognized in this matter. I am working for a home fire that is not my own, because I believe I am right and because I will not willingly see sorrow come to this fireside if I can prevent it.

So I came here to-night, and shall leave now and go to Santa Fe, where important letters will be waiting for me. By the way, neither Edward nor his wife knows my whole part in all this. And it is just as well so. At the last minute young Sidol, not Jack, insisted on his coming to New Mexico. He's afraid something might happen anywhere else. Thinks the old Indian might take to disappearing again. Jack would have had the old fellow up in Denver if he had had his way, for he had the old man ready to 'lay down and play dead' if he told him to. You know your cousin is a born commander, but young Sidol is headstrong and sure of himself, and thinks it will be a safer thing if his wife is with him. That started the Indian to doubting him and demanding to have his wife come, too. She might have to stay away one or two nights. There's no telling. Can some one here take care of the children?"

"We can," Cid replied, quickly. "Leslie and Janis will look after them until I get back. I'll keep them then. Their mother told me just now that she trusted me more than any other woman."

"I don't wonder. I do, too," Bryce declared.

"One question." Cid ignored the last remark. "Would you like to talk with Mrs. Sidol, yourself?"

Bryce smiled.

"No, I really do not care to meet her. Under

the conditions, I prefer not to see her. I'm not doing this for personal reasons, but just 'for goodness' sake,' you understand. That's all."

"Then I'll tell my story," Cid began. And what she had meant to write that night she told in the moonlight before her tent door.

The moon swung up toward the zenith. Leslie and Janis did not return, but Bryce and Cid forgot them in their own common cause to-night.

"Do you know what I'd do if I were Edward Sidol?" Bryce asked, at length. "I'd let that mining property go to the—general. All this wildcat business down here has some element of danger in it eventually. I have an unhappy presentiment, a foreshadowing of misfortune, but I'll hope for the best. I wish I could get a line on Jack, but his plans are all made to go to the Pacific coast. He is probably on the way now. His official report is filed and waiting, to be opened and read after I have sent in returns on this last movement down here. Well, I must be going." Bryce rose as he spoke. "When I see you again I hope this matter will be cleared up." He took Cid's hand. "I want to talk to you then of another case, wherein the name of Sidol will never be recorded. Please don't slip out of the West till I can see you again. Won't you promise me that?"

"I'll be glad to see you, Bryce. I am pretty sure there will be need to see you before I leave

the West. As to the name of Sidol—we may never get away from it, but we may find it a pleasant name, after all. Sometimes the trail doubles back and the second view is better than the first. Good-by," Cid said, comfortingly.

Bryce held her hand and lingered a moment. A tiny cloudlet was dimming the moon's face, but it slipped away, leaving Cid's face beautiful in its clear radiance. The doubt and pain of an hour ago had vanished like thin mist and she was very happy.

Bryce looked back as he crossed the little river. Cid's tent was gleaming white against the dark background of the cañon wall, but over the young mother's tent a jutting rock threw a black shadow.

"God bless that dear woman in that white tent," he murmured, "and may Heaven deal gently always with 'Little Colorado.' I wish that rock didn't put that shadow there. Good Lord, be good to her and keep her as happy as I am to-night."

As Cid Jannison and Mrs. Sidol were leaving the cañon the next morning Janis slipped a letter into Cid's hand.

"Please, Miss Cid, will you mail this over at the station? It's to Mr. Lorton, and I'm in a hurry for him to get it. And tell that P. O. man over there that I must have a letter from 'Peter Rabbit' this mail, sure."

"I'll do everything you ask, Janis. Take good care of the babies. I wish Leslie could go for me

and let me stay with them. They belong most to me, somehow," Cid said, as she told the girl good-by.

The babies were still asleep when the two women left the tents, and the young mother leaned over them lovingly for a long time. Then with tear-wet eyes she turned away.

"What would become of them if anything should happen to me?" she murmured. "I never left them before, but I must go to Edward now."

"They'll be all right," Janis assured her. "Whatever's up next to Cid Jannison's double protected. Count on that."

And with this comforting assurance the mother went away.

. . . . . .

The two women climbed the cliff's side to the top of the mesa, where a touring car waited for them. Some other passengers, en route for Santa Fe, were already in the car, and the party hurried away.

The morning ride across the mesa and through the cañons was exhilarating. The young mother, buoyant with hope, expecting great things from this day's conference, eager to see her husband, trustfully content with Cid for a companion, was radiantly happy. The end of many months of anxiety was near now. Somebody, Mrs. Sidol never dreamed who, had come over to the cañon

late the night before, bringing the Frijoles mail from the station. A letter from Edward Sidol to his wife had prepared her for this journey. "Little Colorado" had hastened to read it to Cid, who at once offered to accompany her to the station to meet her husband—and all was well, oh, wonderfully well.

The car that deposited the two women at the station picked up a passenger for Santa Fe, a big, common-appearing, half-breed Indian, whose eagerness to be off was the only thing that attracted Cid's attention to him. Mrs. Sidol did not see him at all. For, instead of some hours of waiting for the arrival of her husband, she found him already here, eagerly watching for her coming. Knowing from Bryce Carroday of his impetuous nature, Cid was not surprised that he had upset the plans already made. It was in his mental composition to act first and think later.

But Cid did not speculate on mental compositions long, for a big cheery voice cried her name with a very whoop of joy, and she turned to find herself in the arms of Jack Lorton.

"My splendid cousin! I didn't know you were here. I thought you were on your way to the Pacific coast, Alaska, Honolulu, Yap, Jap, anywhere on the map, but here in the Rio Grande Valley," she declared.

"Well, I am here. But you darling old Cinderella, where did you get into this game? Did B.

Carroday know you were here? He never blew a word of it to me," Jack declared, in amazement.

"That must be the way of a lawyer, not to talk too much. But he didn't know I'd find you here. He thought you were headed for Los Angeles or Vancouver. I got into the running at the Frijoles Cañon, New Mexico. We are touring the Southwest for Janis Gwin's husband's health, first; secondly, we are out, Les and I, to get a bigger grip on the real America that we see only the edge of in New York and New England. Just as the native sons and daughters see only mountain walls out here and call them the U. S. A. If we welfaring, Americanizing, public-spirited folks really mean to make a better America, we had better know the place first."

Briefly then Jack heard the story of the journey to New Mexico, its twofold purpose, and the joys of the way.

Jack's delight in Janis Gwin's comfort was exuberant.

"The little cat! Isn't it funny that among all the help I've had and known in office work, splendid types of fine young womanhood, girls of ability and education and culture—I say, isn't it funny that I should always take so much to this little red-headed creature? She is grateful for favors and she'll pay it all back to you in some way, sometime, you good old Cid," he declared.

"Not I. Leslie Jannison is doing all this. It

was her plan entirely. We could have begun this new study in the South or the Mississippi Valley just as well. But what comes next here?" Cid asked.

"Start the lady and her husband toward 'somewhere in New Mexico' to have that conference with old Turkey-in-the-straw, and take up your case later. Yonder they are now, waiting, and there's the man to personally conduct them thither. Don't stare at him, Cid; he's sensitive about his size. But he's acquainted with the trail and somebody must be a witness in this powwow, I suppose, or old Turkey-in-the-straw will disappear. He's a vanishing sort of bird. Not being a lawyer myself, my belief is that he will sell out the whole crowd yet, and that guide man knows it as well as I do," Jack declared.

"But, Jack, do you know who that man is? He made out to be a real-estate dealer and some other things in New York City, for my tenant, Mrs. General Sidol," Cid insisted.

"Oh yes, and any number of other things on top of these. But he has the Indian's secret, all right, and he scared the old fellow out on lawyers and army men. He is holding that information as a club over Mrs. General Sidol's head, and—well, something happened there. It's not my row, dear lady. The man Bryce sent up here to take these people to meet the party of the second part, a half-breed fellow, left on the car for Santa Fe

ten minutes ago. The whole plan for the day is changed and Bryce's man is hotfooting it down to tell Bryce about it. I don't know how this little man got into the thing. He's what I used to think was the biggest word in the dictionary—ubiquitous. I can't compute this affair with any kind of instruments; it's all too irregular. Anyhow, he is to take the Sidols clear into the heart of the mountains; but they are all mountaineers out here, you know. At the last minute it was all old Lo and young Sidol could agree upon. But the Indian has given his word to tell the Sidols a lot, and he'll do it. He's just that uncivilized."

"But I thought they were going to a little hut upstream," Cid insisted.

"That was the plan. It isn't the plan now. That's what upset Bryce's half-caste and started him off to tell about it. He was just ready to start into the cañon to bring the old Indian down here to the hut to meet these folks when the Little Thing squeaked in and insisted on his going with the party up into the cañon instead as a safer proposition on getting any information. It's partly this guide man's doing, but mostly Sidol's headiness, I believe. There are ponies waiting up there for the three, and the M. E. conference, as it were, will be in the heart of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, I say again. I've been up there. It is a beautiful place, and so everything is as safe as a safety razor. But Cid? Cid?"

"Yes, Jack. Leslie is over at the cañon. I must hurry back to-day if I can. You are going over, aren't you?"

"No." The answer was definite.

Cid waited, but Jack had nothing further to offer.

"I almost forgot a letter that Janis sent for you. I was to mail it. Here it is." Cid put the letter in her cousin's hand.

The young man read the message it contained, looked away, then read it again. At last he turned a grave face toward his cousin.

"I must get the Sidols on their way; then I'll go back with you, Cid. Read this and see why. I can't desert the faithful 'Live Wire' now, when I am so near to her. We must hurry."

While Jack busied himself with other matters, Cid read the letter. It ran:

DEAR MR. LORTON,—Miss Cid has told you why I am here, but nobody can tell how good she and Miss Leslie are to me. Peter Rabbit is doing splendid. Thinks he will get well right away. There are some things about Daddy's property I don't understand and Peter Rabbit is too poorly to look after, and they must be looked after soon or we will lose everything. I don't like anybody but you to do it. I am so much obliged for the nice message in Miss Cid's letter after Daddy left us. It is lovely here.

Very respectfully,

JANIS.

. . . . . .

While the preparations for the trip over the unknown trail to the little hidden cañon were being

completed, Edward Sidol took Jack Lorton aside for a word.

"Lorton, I can never thank you enough for your interest. If this turns out right, and I am sure it will, I hope to pay Bryce Carroday well for his part. If anything ever happened to me I'd want Bryce to manage my affairs. I couldn't trust my wife's interests with anybody else. He's the finest, truest man I ever knew. Tell him I said that, won't you, Lorton?"

Jack agreed and with good-bys and good wishes the young father and mother hurried away up the dim trail toward the deserted sheep herder's hut, whence they were to begin their ride to the little cañon in the mountains to meet the old Indian who was waiting for them there.

XVIII

PORTRAIT OF A LADY

HALF an hour after the Sidols had left the station, Cid and Jack took the same trail up the valley of the Rio Grande. They had much to say to each other of their own affairs, and the ties of blood relation between the Lorton and Jannison families were always very strong. Cid had never seemed quite so fine and womanly to her big cousin as she did after these months of separation; while she, in turn, studied her hero relative with a new delight. He had grown brown and more rugged. The mountain air that carries strength in every breeze seemed to have loved this Eastern boy hunting for 'the balm of hurt minds' in its cooling caress.

A party of tourists heading toward Taos and its artists' colony came from somewhere and passed the two strolling up the dim trail toward the deserted hut. The day was warm, with unusual humidity in the air for a land where rains are rare. Cid and Jack ate their lunch in the old hut where bits of the drama in the case of Sidol *versus*

Sidol had been enacted. But of this they knew nothing. Across the stream the black mesa walls stood sheer and silent between them and the far-away sunny cañon of the Frijoles, where they pictured Leslie and Janis romping away a bright afternoon with little Teddy and Joyce Sidol.

"Impossible black thing," Cid said, meditatively, as she gazed up at the cliff's mightiness.

"And yet not so black or impossible as the barriers that are sometimes erected between human hearts," Jack was thinking aloud.

"And distance and new friends and new work do not satisfy," Cid ventured.

"They never do," Jack replied.

"Neither does the call to public welfare, fine and ennobling as it is, fill all of a heart's needs. Did you ever notice how quickly missionaries marry? One would think them too consecrated to their work for others, to think of marriage. The biggest need they have is for the solace of a home and home love. And maybe it was the call of the West because somebody was out here somewhere, the wish to atone by helpfulness to one who had served my fine boy cousin, that brought my girl cousin here, the one with the big dark eyes that I promised said fine boy I'd be good to," Cid said, gently.

And then they talked of other things.

It was midafternoon before the two came back to the little station, to be near when the returning

car was ready for the start up the trail to the top of the Pajarito Plateau, through which, a dozen miles away, the Frijoles gashes its deep incision.

"I didn't know where you were. I didn't think you went to Taos, or wherever it was, with that party this afternoon," the station agent said. "There was a fellow rushed up here from Santa Fe early after noon, wantin' to get word over to the cañon. The phone went dead over there this mornin', so he went on himself. And there was a party goin' out hotfoot somewhere from there, not a half hour ago. But they're always comin' and goin' like ants, human bein's are. There's a storm comin'. I hope you get across before it gets to you. Phone up from Santa Fe at noon said the weather'd be fierce to-night."

But Cid and Jack had little interest in who came and went just then; and, overhead, the smiling skies denied any suggestion of stormy weather.

The sun was low when they reached the cañon. In front of the Jannison tent Bryce Carroday was sitting, with little Joyce and Teddy Sidol on the ground beside him. Both children were swaying contentedly back and forth, lisping in singsong that "Papa's a noble and mamma's a queen."

"Why, how come?" Cid exclaimed. "Where's Leslie? Where's Janis?"

Bryce's face was very grave.

"I tried to get word over here from Santa Fe

this morning, but failed, so I came up at noon, hoping to catch you at Buckman. They didn't think that you had gone on to Taos, but they couldn't locate you anywhere; the wire was out of order here. I supposed, of course, that you were here, so I came on. Albuquerque telephoned that Mrs. Gwin's husband is very low and for her to come at once. Everything seems to hinge on her getting there as soon as possible. Miss Leslie went with Mrs. Gwin as far as Santa Fe. She hopes to get on to Albuquerque to-night some way, and Miss Leslie will be back here by noon to-morrow. I am staying with the little folks, waiting for you to come in. I sort of untangled the news over at Buckman enough to know things were not going as originally planned. I missed Half-breed Joe on the trail, but he got loose and came back to overtake me at the station. What young Sidol didn't mix up the Little Tool did, it seems. So instead of settling things in the open and having it done with by this time there is delay and uncertainty again. Sidol's misjudgment may wreck the ship yet, but I hope not. We can only hope for the best and make it the best when we get at it again. The weather report is for bad storms down the Rio Grande Valley to-night. Everything seems to have broken loose at once. I am gladder to see you, Jack, than I ever was before, you old Horse Thief! You are where you are needed to-night."

A chill breeze swept up the valley just then, and the gray evening fell suddenly, as if the sun behind the western wall had dropped into a storm cloud, hidden from the view of the camp in the cañon. Hidden from view of the cañon, too, was all the wildness of the night that followed in the valley of the Rio Grande. Few men whose lives had been spent there could remember a companion to it. The storms, seeming to swirl in suddenly from all points of the compass, fell upon one another like battalions of enemies on a battle ground a hundred miles long; with the cannonade of crag-splitting thunder and the terrific splendor of the lightning now sweeping in sheets across the heavens, wrapping each mountain peak in a cloak of living flame, now cleaving a path through the pitch blackness from sky to earth in a long, zigzagging shaft of blinding brightness. The rain fell in sudden intermittent floods that drowned the landscape. And when the thing was ended no clouds trailed away, for that they all had burst themselves into splinters of mist and were not.

An exquisite day followed that wild night in the Rio Grande Valley, with a cleansed earth under a turquoise sky, an exhilarating air, and all the wide plains and wooded slopes, wild cañons and tall mountain peaks, deluged with golden sunlight. And in all that valley nothing was sweeter nor more joyous than Teddy and Joyce

Sidol, now cuddling in "Mit Fid's" arms, now prattling impossible things to each other in the language only little tots can understand.

The storm, save for the tip end of a fierce downpour, did not reach the Frijoles Cañon at all, and Cid and Jack and Bryce all slept too soundly to know there had been any rainfall. The wires out of Buckman were down and Cid and her two guests were ignorant also of the night's terrible tempest and all the human tragedy in its track.

Early in the morning a cry of distress came from Half-breed Joe. The messenger, an Indian boy, did not speak English, and the brief note he brought had been so hastily written that it was hardly legible, but its intent was clear. Something terrible had happened and Carroday and Lorton must come at once. Buckman knew nothing of the extent of the storm. No word had gotten in from Santa Fe, no train had come down from the north over the Rio Grande line, no message from the three who went up a dim trail out of sight of the station twenty-four hours before. So far as this Indian boy could comprehend the queries, he gave no information; but with gesture and grunt he made it clear that there had been a storm. That was all.

When Bryce Carroday told Cid good-by Joyce Sidol was in her arms and Teddy was clinging to her gown.

"I don't know what's broken loose, but we will send word back as soon as we can," he promised.

He held Cid's hand close for a moment, then turned away half jealous of Jack Lorton, who put his arm around his cousin and kissed her affectionately.

"You look like as good a mother as you do a cousin, Cindereller, which is saying a whole set, complete in ten volumes. Good-by, and don't let these precious things fall up out of the cañon till we get back."

. . . . . .

The hours of that beautiful day dragged slowly for Cid Jannison. She was thankful for the children, who alone could make the minutes move quickly. She had little thought of Leslie, who was safe in Santa Fe and would be coming in soon. For Janis Gwin she sent up a wordless prayer that the life of him whom the girl so loved might be spared, or for endurance to meet her loss if loss must come. The affairs at Buckman were beyond her reach. She hoped that nothing really serious that could touch Jack or Bryce had called them thither, and that the Sidol matter was happily adjusted now and all would be well. As she followed the day's usual round her mind was mostly with the little ones, whose prattle, like the gurgle of the Frijoles River over the bit of

rocks, came sweetly, till their "sleepy time" stilled their happy tongues.

The long white afternoon ebbed slowly. Nightfall brought a brief message from Jack, relayed from somewhere. The telephone lines were up again, but news of the storm's havoc from Albuquerque north to the Colorado line oozed in slowly. No word came from Leslie, but that was not remarkable. She was waiting to hear from Janis before she called. She would be in the cañon soon. Oh, if only Jack could meet her here. But would it mean anything if he did? In all the uncertainty of the day Cid remembered Jack and Leslie together. She had spoken truly when she said that they made the romance of her life.

Jack's message, as well as Cid could gather it, was for her to wait. They would come soon. Would tell her all then. Tell what?

Another day came. The babies had half forgotten their mother under Cid's loving care. They prattled of daddy and mammy and flowers and kitty; they swung in a little camp rocker, and built up stone on stone, and drank milk, and rolled and tumbled on the Navajo rug on the tent floor, and "loved" "Mit Fid," and cuddled in her arms, and had not a line of shadow in the sunshine of their day. Of such is the Kingdom, a bit of heavenly sweetness in that little cañon beside the Frijoles River.

Cid tried to reach Leslie at Santa Fe, but the

girl had not registered there at all. She tried to telephone to Albuquerque. The wires were out of order and the telegraph lines were hard to secure through the Buckman connection. All that remained was to wait confidently, knowing that when bad news starts it makes few stops. She would have heard before this if anything were amiss with Leslie.

On the evening of the second day after the storm Cid sat before the tent, watching the moonrise, when suddenly Bryce Carroday came striding up the pathway toward her. In the dim light he looked haggard and his step was that of a weary man.

"We didn't write you because we were too busy, and the wires were down and we couldn't tell you everything, so we waited," he explained, as he sat down before the tent door.

"I knew you would report at the right time. I began to be more concerned about Leslie and Janis than about you," Cid replied.

"How are they? I've wondered, even in the stress of other things, how they got through." Bryce said.

"I haven't heard a word from Janis," Cid replied.

"And Leslie?" Bryce asked, eagerly.

"She's in Santa Fe, I suppose, unless she went on to Albuquerque. I have had no word from her, either, not even where she is stopping, but

she can take care of herself," Cid answered. "I think she is waiting to hear from Janis. She may be with Janis now or she may want to be near so she can go to the little girl quickly. Meanwhile she is probably reveling in all the historic treasures of that strange old Santa Fe town."

"Oh, Cid, Jack was going down to Santa Fe to-morrow to start for the Pacific coast. I made him come over here—in hopes, you know. He's dead tired, and asleep in our tent right now. He did most of the work we've had to do since I saw you. I had it out with the old Horse Thief at last, and I know that however far he travels his heart will always be back in New England. He's not the kind to change or forget—but he's no idler."

"Bryce, in good will we have tried to shape their lives for Jack and Leslie. Their destiny is theirs, and it will be well or ill for them as they themselves must determine." Cid's voice was always pleasant to hear, but to Bryce Carroday it was music to-night.

"You always lift a weight off my shoulders whenever I talk with you, Cid," he said, with his frank smile. "To-night I'm the bearer of sad news. I've waited a little to speak of it because I wanted a minute of rest with you."

"I hope I can help you after you tell me as well as now," Cid said, gently.

"You are always helpful. But here's the

business that has taken Jack and me two awful days to settle. You'll forgive me if I tell it slowly." Bryce paused and his face grew stern. "What we human beings struggle months to accomplish, Fate or Providence—a superpower somewhere, settles in a flash. Things might have fallen out the same way anywhere, but neither Jack nor I wanted young Sidol to come down here. He would come and bring his wife and babies along. I say it might have been the same hard fortune anywhere. I claim no virtue that can resist the inevitable. Briefly, then, you remember that little man who did detective work for Mrs. Sidol? He had that Indian's secret long ago and he's the scout that scared the old fellow into silence and fear of the law and the military. He was quick and capable and shrewd, and he played the game a lot better than I gave him credit for being able to do. But—he had his price. He quarreled with Mrs. Estelle Sidol. He urged her to have this case against Edward Sidol dropped. She worked that for a while, for she had the inside information he had given her. But the love of the money in prospect made her believe she could control him, and the old Indian through him, forever, so she changed her line regardless of his advice and insistence. She got the divorce matter cinched on the plea it would be bad stuff in this suit out here. She was right in that. When she thought the old Indian was shut up she plunged on, knowing

through her Little Tool that Jack's findings would win for her side. Incidentally, she meant to show that Jack had done it all for her sake. That's her line of goods, you know. You remember what I told you about Half-breed Joe, the man I sent in here to find if you and the Sidols were here when I lost your trail in Santa Fe. The Little Tool came up just ahead of him, and dropped in and climbed out without your seeing him, unless Janis got him. I think she did. I don't gamble on her any. Then the poor rascal got into the game again and upset our plans. He wasn't any more welcome now in that Indian's little place than a lawyer or a general would have been, on account of a certain ring episode. But to go on.

"Three days ago you know young Sidol and his wife started with this same person to meet the old Indian. Here's the rest of that. The papers in the case, held safe by old Wah-hoo-Fiddlestick, given him to keep by the old grandfather, show that the disputed boundary line, now clearly established, is the *outer* limit, not the *division* line through the Sidol inheritance at all. Nobody wins; for the worthless land belongs to the old man's heirs still, and the other part is supposed to belong to a firm in England; but it doesn't; they own what touches the farther side and there'll be rich picking for some attorney to manage it for them."

"Why, Bryce Carroday," Cid exclaimed, "then neither the uncle nor the nephew is the richer?"

Bryce gripped the arm of his chair and looked away. When he spoke his voice was very deep.

"By the time this was known it was late in the afternoon, and before they were aware of it one of the worst storms ever known in the Rio Grande Valley was on them. Edward Sidol and his wife and the nameless one rushed into a cavernlike place, behind the hut, although the Indian begged them to stay in the house with him. The lightning was awful. I imagine the Sidols thought of their babies out here, and the thought that you were with them must have been a comforting assurance. The three evidently had just started to take refuge under some rocks when a bolt hit the place. Cid—Teddy and Joyce are orphans."

A silence fell. The valley was lovely under the serene moon. There was the soft twitter of a bird on its hidden nest, the river sang softly also as it slipped away toward the turbulent Rio Grande; and in the tent, a little space away, two golden heads lay pillowed in slumber that would never more be pillowed on their mother's loving bosom.

"What follows?" Cid asked, at length.

"The little man was buried in the cañon, in a bit of consecrated ground of an almost forgotten mission. What else could be done for him? He knew for months that the Sidols had no right to

the mines, and he hugged the information close to him, to be used as an asset to get hush money. He even tried to get a grip on the English syndicate that controls the claims beyond it. Let him be forgotten. As to the Sidols, distant relatives finally took hold of things after we had burned the wires off the poles between here and Denver. The bodies are on their way to their burial now. It is not far up the Conejos where they had their home."

"And the children?" Cid asked, anxiously.

"Distant relatives say, an orphan asylum. There is practically no estate left them," Bryce said. "It seems Edward had a sort of premonition of tragedy pending, for he left word—and maybe a will—that I should look after his affairs if anything happened to him. Strange, wasn't it? I am going up there as soon as they wire me. I came over here to wait and rest."

"Has General Sidol no interest in this at all?" Cid asked.

"Not now. No property. No sly flirtation. This is out of his line of life. His wife, as you probably know, finally arranged for a maiden sister of Captain Kilwarth, her first husband, to legally adopt her two boys, and she's free. She assured me once that the general was a real father to them. He was the kind of father that she was mother. The precious pair have left Denver for a trip around the world. They may go to the

devil or they may camp in the next cave to mine. I don't care which." Bryce was looking at the cliffs, honeycombed with the old homes of the people who had once held this valley. "They do not concern me, coming or going. If I am to administer Edward Sidol's affairs I must look out for the babies in there. Incidentally, the senior members of my firm refuse to consider my withdrawal from the partnership. It looks now as if they will manage that good mining property for its owners, and they seem to think I am responsible for getting this new business for the firm. The seniors go after big things, all right, and I am informed now that it is a lot bigger than we thought it was. But, Cid, here comes the strangest part of the story, to me. When I was in New York City, Miss Jane Kilwarth, Estelle Sidol's sister-in-law, who relieved her so by legally adopting her two pretty sons—this Miss Jane came to me the day before I left for the West. She told me what I had never known before—namely, that her brother, the naval officer now dead, divorced husband of General Sidol's wife, had the title to some mining property in Colorado. This property, considered worthless, had been left to her by will to hold in trust for his two sons. A little man—oh, that nameless cipher gone now into everlasting oblivion—that little man had sold Miss Kilwarth a map that might help in getting things clear out here, for the boundary lines were not

well defined. She gave me the map, which only in a very irregular way showed a trail to the old hut. But I took up the matter of the property with her. That property is the rich productive region that was in litigation till the Indian gave up the legal records that establish its boundaries. It is all written out clearly on the margin of the accurate map, and certified to by the old man's signature. I see now why the old grandfather kept it all so sly. He knew he had no right to it, and got the old red man to keep his secret a long while. That is why he left the Indian the rest of his belongings. The English claim is still farther away. Jane Kilwarth has and holds what uncle and nephew each strove to keep for himself. It is the little Kilwarth boys, happily adopted and out of their mother's way in her social and financial needs, that are millionaires to-day, and 'the mills of the gods' still 'grind slowly.' But I am thinking about the little folks here just now, who are not heirs to any mining property."

Cid Jannison leaned forward, her face full in the light.

"Bryce, once I thought I loved a man. It seems long ago. I was only nineteen. I am thirty, now, and leaving that behind me. I was very happy until one day I found how little that man cared for what meant real life to me—home and friends and love. He was society mad. Now I have a home, a cave among the New York City

cliff dwellers, and more friends than I deserve. Let me be a mother to these little children who are homeless and friendless now. Let me adopt them as mine and give to them the *cave-right* that is their divine right to have."

"Cid, would you? Can you? The soul of their dead mother will be happier in heaven if you do. Oh, you wonderful, wonderful woman! Cid, the evening that I met you in your home I had just learned from Estelle Sidol of her cruel part in all this Western matter and how she had deceived my 'Little Colorado' about my being alive. I've told you about that already. I vowed that day I'd never trust another woman. Before midnight that night I knew, as I know now, that I had never, until that evening in your charming home, met the one woman in all the world, to me, most worthy of any man's trust; the one woman I could love as a man loves, not alone for beauty, but for the strength of her womanly character. May I share with you the love and care of these orphan children and, as you said the other night, 'make the name of Sidol a happy one to us,' after all?"

So, far from the elegant setting of the New York apartment, with its shaded lights and its luxurious furnishings of soft heliotrope and rose—down in front of a little tent by the moon-kissed waters of the picturesque Frijoles Cañon—Bryce Carroday and Cid Jannison knew the sweetness of the old, old story.

XIX

THE COURAGE OF PEACE

MEANWHILE it was well for Janis Gwin, on that night in the Ceremonial Cave, that the moonlight was darkened by no shadow of what the next twenty-four hours held for her, when the coming of Bryce Carroday turned all the golden sunlight to gloom. In the swift change from hope and happiness to sorrow and dread she clung to Leslie for help. And Leslie did not fail her. Janis was a plant of the big-city rooting that, with protection, flourishes; without it, perishes.

The two had had a long forenoon playing with Joyce and Teddy up and down the rippling Frijoles. The little ones' "sleepy time" had come early to-day, and Janis and Leslie were sitting lazily outside of the tent when Bryce Carroday appeared before them. Cid had not told them of the events of the evening before. It was late when the two, happy but thoughtful, had come back from their wonderful hour in the Ceremonial Cave, and neither of them was talkative. Cid Jannison herself was not talkative. The reasons

for Bryce's hurried call were too personal to be discussed even with Leslie just yet.

Janis was the first to see the coming of Bryce Carroday to-day.

"Golly! Look what's loose around here!" she exclaimed, in her surprise dropping into her old slangy phrases that the society of the Jannisons was rapidly modifying.

Leslie looked, but her surprise was mingled with a quick apprehension and her first thought was of Cid.

"I came on an important errand," Brice said, as soon as the greetings were over, and the mere statement of business in Santa Fe had explained the cause for his being in this part of New Mexico. "I tried to reach you by wire, but failed. Is Miss Cid anywhere near?"

Miss Cid had not returned, reasons for her absence were stated, and Bryce was troubled, for he had depended on her help most of all in this matter. But gently as he could he gave his message.

"Mr. Gwin is very ill. He wants to see Janis. The doctors say it is the one thing that will do the most good for him. She must go to him at once. To-morrow"—Bryce did not say would be too late, but the two who listened knew what he meant—"will be so long for him to wait. I'll go back with you, Mrs. Gwin."

The man's voice was fatherly in its sympathy.

Janis sat very still for a minute, her face chalky, her bright eyes like glittering steel. Then with a low wail she turned and fell into Leslie Jannison's arms.

Bryce turned away and was silent as Leslie cuddled her close, and soothed her with all a mother's tenderness.

"You'll come with me, Miss Leslie?" she begged. "Oh, 'Peter Rabbit' is all I've got. He isn't going to die. Please, please stay with me," she pleaded.

"Yes, Janis, yes," Leslie assured her, until the young wife's first shock of grief was spent and she leaned her cheek against the girl's shoulder and sobbed quietly.

"We must plan quickly, Miss Jannison," Bryce urged. "Mrs. Gwin must leave here for Santa Fe in an hour. She can get the train to Lamy from there, and on to Albuquerque to-night. We'll get through all right. I'll take the best care of you. Be a good soldier, Janis." There was a world of comfort in the man's voice. "Miss Cid isn't here yet. She must be gone to the end of the journey with her friend, this Mrs. Sidol, and will not be back for some time, maybe, and here are these little ones."

But Janis only clung the closer to her one friend and pleaded piteously:

"Come with me to Santa Fe. I'll go on from there alone. Excuse me, Mr. Carroday," she added with a struggle for self-control. "I know

you are kind to offer, but I want Miss Leslie now. You can't understand." The agony in the blue eyes spoke more than the lips. "I'll be a good soldier. I will—if Miss Leslie goes part way with me. Miss Cid said she would be back to-night. She said the babies belonged most to her, anyhow. She can't stay away long if their mother is gone."

Bryce Carroday looked away again. This little office girl of Jack Lorton's said strange things to him.

"The custodian's wife will be glad to look after the babies to-night. She is as fond of them as the rest of us are," Leslie offered. "I do not feel at all sure of Cid now. She will probably be away till the mother gets back. I can go with Janis to Santa Fe and be back before noon to-morrow, to be with them. I hope, Mr. Carroday, that you can stay in the cañon till some of us get in again. I feel responsible for these little tots left here in our care. But I promised myself that I would also take care of Janis, and she needs me now."

Janis looked up gratefully and tried to take courage to meet whatever lay between now and the sunrise of to-morrow.

"I would be happier to go with you two," Bryce declared, "but I will stay here gladly if it will make you less anxious about your charge here. You can get back by to-morrow forenoon, as you say. There seems to be no certainty as to just when your cousin will come."

And so it was arranged.

Leslie longed to ask about Jack. In New York City she could have done it. Why could she not here? There was no answer to the query.

So the afternoon of the day when Cid and Jack had cared little for the Buckman agent's talk of "a party goin' hotfoot, south, somewhere," these two so near and dear to them were hurrying toward Santa Fe. It was sunset when they reached the little city. The skies had darkened. Behind them a storm with terrific lightning came down from the north, only to deflect and lose itself over among the cañons of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Sheets of rain and blue-black clouds crossed the valley before them. But the trail to Santa Fe was covered in comfort.

Janis Gwin, after her first shock, grew dully brave and talked of many things, but her blue eyes were like blue steel, and her lips were pale. In this sudden change from joyous hope to dread she saw Leslie Jannison in a new light—tender, capable, calm. She tried to forget her grief in the study of the girl who had been so good to her and hers. Studying people was such habitual meat and drink to Janis that it became her mental refuge now, and her mind ran in strangely philosophical lines, as minds will do that hold a burden they will not give place to for the moment.

"I know why 'Big Sister' loves her," Janis thought. "She can do things so easy. Golly!

What a war that was to make this fine woman out of just a New England girl! And she's sweet to me as daddy used to be. Oh, if I can only get to Albuquerque before—" A long sobbing breath and she began to talk nervously of the weather.

Leslie left Janis on the hotel veranda in Santa Fe while she arranged for the remainder of the young wife's journey to Albuquerque. She came back soon, however, and sat beside the sorrowful little figure, her own face shadowed with anxiety.

"Janis, there is no train now from here to Lamy, where we get the through train to Albuquerque. We could get down there—to Lamy, I mean—in a car easily enough, but there's a washout on the main line. There won't be a train over that until to-morrow morning. It is sixty miles to go by the highway to Albuquerque. The moon is full to-night, but they tell me there are storms all around us. I can't get a chauffeur in town. There are many good ones here, but something doing somewhere has taken all the reliable ones away, and you must not risk your life with a drunken driver after night on a wild road."

Janis's face grew pallid and she sat motionless, with fingers locked. The hour of her stormy grief had passed. This was only still, dull heartbreak.

"I can't go on to-night? And they said 'Peter Rabbit' mightn't last till morning unless I got there; but it would do a lot if I got to him in

time. I know it would. It's pneumonia, or something awful, I'm sure. I wish 'Big Sister' was here. That's what I call Mr. Lorton, behind his back, of course, just for fun," Janis explained quickly, "but I thank you so much, Miss Leslie, for all you've done for me. It was so good of you to come this far and to try and get me down there. But you can't, so you are through."

Leslie made no reply, but sat looking out toward the mountains against the sky line that in the weird light of sunset on the impending storm clouds seemed all marvelously near; a lurid phantasm of commingling earth and heaven, vast and superbly terrible. Something in the coloring against the black mountain walls and blacker rain clouds called up the picture of a night in France. Black, for the hospital dare show no lights, until a German bomb had blown a wing of it to splinters. Then the quick flight for safety. The wounded men dying by the wayside. The awful mud. The stumps and gullies. The superhuman strength in hands that carried the helpless. The beating rain. The swollen streams. And, overhead, the heavens alight with the fires of hell, or horribly black with never a star beam nor line of hope to show that God still cared. And herself, the Leslie Jannison of that night, struggling along beside the litters, cold hands clinging to hers, and in her ears strange, gurgling noises from dying throats. The failing strength, the

sense of the end of effort, the realization that in another moment she must slip down in all this black terror and perish alone. And then—the sudden sense of power, the cry of America in her soul, the sure, sweet promise of the God of the old New England fathers:

> When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.

And then a light somewhere, one moment seen, then lost. But it showed the way to safety and warmth in a hidden shelter. And in its brief gleaming it fell somehow on the red, white, and blue of Old Glory.

The girl turned now and looked at Janis, in her misery no longer asking anything nor expecting anything, the dull agony of hopelessness in her voice as she had said:

"You can't, so you are through."

As Leslie looked, her fine young face grew suddenly bright with resolve and her beautiful dark eyes shone with a new illumining. A line of Whittier, dear old poet of a dear homeland, came from somewhere out of the void into her memory:

> He who cooled the furnace, and smoothed the angry wave,
> And tamed the Chaldean lion, is mighty still to save.

In that memory, all doubts fled away, leaving only a sturdy New England girl, true daughter of a sturdy ancestry.

"If I have been brave in war, why should I not be fearless in peace? This little woman may save a life she loves if I help her now. Why should I be afraid?" she asked herself.

"You say I am through, but I am not through yet."

Leslie's voice had sounded just like this behind the battle lines when some surgeon had said:

"We are through with this case now. The poor boy can't live, anyhow. We'll save the ones who can live."

"Let me be 'Big Sister's' sister to you, Janis. I'll drive you to Albuquerque. I'm not afraid of the road or the car or the storm. I want to do it."

"Oh no, Miss Leslie, you mustn't!" Janis insisted, definitely. "You promised Mr. Carroday to go right back and take care of the babies till Miss Cid could get back from that trip. He'll be waiting for you and they will need you. And there's the danger and all. You mustn't," Janis ended in a despairing wail.

"But I must," Leslie replied. "I have told you I promised myself that I'd take care of you. I can't leave you here. We'll start in ten minutes if you are willing to trust me." No one who had seen Leslie Jannison's face as she said this would have doubted her. "I can get all the directions for the route; there will be a moon part of the way, I'm sure; I will get a strong car

and a powerful engine. I have driven automobiles since the days before they quit calling them horseless carriages. I have an owl's eyes after dark. We can make the sixty miles all right," Leslie explained in a matter-of-fact way.

And so perfect was her self-control that Janis did not have the smallest suggestion of the courage with which the brave girl was sustaining her promises.

And the journey began.

Twenty-four hours before, these two had wandered up a picturesque moonlit way, and sat on the rim of the kiva in the old Ceremonial Cave, breathing in the clear, white beauty of the peaceful night. And now from Jemez to Ortiz, from the Sangre de Cristo to the Sandia, the storm clouds were tossed. And when the full moon shone against them their blackness was appalling.

The first few miles of the journey, however, were uneventful. The car purred a sing-song as it told off the miles steadily. As they crossed the valley of the Santa Fe River a sudden downpour of rain blurred the way, and Leslie halted the car until the shower should spend itself. When the rain ceased the moon climbed out of a smothering mass of darkness and the lone car with its two lone occupants hurried on. From the level of the Santa Fe Valley to the top of the mesa the road winds, not like the velvet-smooth highway through the Adirondacks that Leslie had followed in ease

and security. This was a deeply rutted, uncertain track. But the car lamps were strong and the moon for many miles was kind. Speed was impossible, but the security was comforting, although the loneliness of the way grew more and more depressing. So they climbed to the mesa's top and followed the trail across its high level, mile on mile.

After the first half hour Leslie and Janis did not try to talk. Leslie's eyes and hands were on her work; and Janis, though her heart was heavy, watched every motion of the car. Away to the northward, crossing the track behind them, a storm was raging. In the dim void far ahead of them the clouds were rent with lightning, more vivid, incessant, and terrifying than either had ever seen before. They were in an area of moonlight between the two, and so far from any human habitation, and from any other human being, it seemed that they sat in the center of the living world, alone on a vast, weirdly illumined island around whose distant edges storms roared and chaos ruled. The rain back in the valley had been kinder than this. It was natural—in a way, companionable—a thing to brace against and defy. They were human beings among natural things down there. Up here there was nothing except these two with all the supernatural and utterly impossible forces glowering at them out of far, unattainable wastes of distance. The warfare of man's hate is terrible,

but against the seeming forgetfulness of the God of the universe His creatures know no strength of resistance.

Suddenly the car came to the sharp rim of the mesa. Two thousand feet below lay the level plains that reach from the Sandia Mountains to the Rio Grande River. By day this scene is majestic. And as the traveler looks out upon it his own insignificance as an atom in the universe overwhelms him. By night, with the mad elements in furious combat along the crests of the Sandia, the ghostly blue table-lands beyond the Rio Grande's western bound, and the blackness closing swiftly down upon the travelers from the north, the scene had need of a Milton to picture it well.

The two had reached that portion of the automobile highway that for two centuries was a part of the old trail from the capital of New Mexico to Chihuahua, and for countless centuries earlier may have been trodden by the moccasined feet of the wide-wandering tribesmen of an artistic, creative people who lived and wrought in this Orient of the North American continent. Down the almost sheer face of the mesa the old trail ran, where only an Indian, eagle-eyed, sure of foot, dauntless of heart, would have dared to make a pathway for his tribe to follow in. "La Bajada" ("The Descent"), the Spanish Mexican of a later era named it. "La Bajada Hill," the

highway maps record it now. The road here is a wonderful piece of engineering skill, winding in manifold curves, doubling back upon itself, hugging closely the steep cliff's sides, running in serpentine waves along the less impossible sloping spaces, crawling head foremost down the rocky bluffs, sometimes as if hanging in midair, sometimes slipping between low crevice walls. And always, to the thoughtful, a tribute no less to the untrained human intelligence of the first trail makers of a prehistoric age than to the skilled brain of the twentieth-century master builder who laid down this highway for a busy, restless folk to go forth upon. Only a clear head and a steady hand should be behind the wheel in the car that passes that way by day. And it was night. And two women were alone upon the crest of the mesa, pausing on the edge of the rim rock, with the wide level of the Rio Grande Valley before them, hemmed in by the Sandia Mountain heights on the left, and the river and its great rock plateaus on the right, and below them—just beyond their feet—La Bajada.

Leslie Jannison had not anticipated this. True, it had entered into all the instructions she had received. But she had driven through the White Mountains, the Blue Ridges, the Adirondacks. She did not gather the full advice:

"When you get across the mesa you'll come to La Bajada Hill. It's a tremendous drop.

You'll have to be careful there, lady," and much more to the same effect.

And:

"I 'bout kissed that car good-by," from its owner who had rented it to Leslie. "It can go down La Bajada, though, I reckon, if that pretty girl is careful. Got her grit to try it, but she said she must get down to Alberkirk to-night."

"Why didn't you tell her about the Hill?" from a by-sitter.

"Tell her. Good Lord! I drawed a skeleton of the place showin' where the nerves an' blood vessels an' muscles was located. I named every vertebree in that fifteen thousand feet of Hell's Alley. But—I don't know—I've let a lot of cars go out to tourists, and never felt surer of the grip on the wheel than when I took note of that girl's big eyes. They just *looked* power out of 'em. Here's hopin'."

But Leslie Jannison, driving hopefully out of Santa Fe on the hard, smooth road, and Leslie sitting on the rim of La Bajada, faced different problems. And it was night. And everywhere in the wide universe, save just here, storms raged. The call for a courage she had never known before was sounding in her soul. Here was a peril, direct and terribly certain. One false turn, one wrong estimate of distance, one pulsebeat of fright that shatters control, and the fate of both was sealed. But—it meant the life of one beloved,

this journey she was controlling. She had been brave in war. Could she not be fearless in peace?

He who cooled the furnace, and smoothed the angry wave,
And tamed the Chaldean lion, is mighty still to save.

Again the lines rang in her memory. It was the hour of her supreme test, and Leslie clenched her hands on the steering wheel and faced the thing that wild New Mexican night thrust upon her.

As she halted the car Janis had laid a cold hand on hers.

"What is this, Miss Leslie, down before us?" she asked, turning a white face toward her companion.

"It is La Bajada Hill—'The Descent.'" There was not a quaver in the low voice, and the hand that patted Janis's hand was warm now with an even pulsebeat. "It is three miles to the bottom by the road, but only about one-seventh as far if you drop off. We'll follow the road."

A sudden sweep of lightning across the sky from out of the northwest revealed the trail, steep and winding and narrow, back and forth, forth and back, across the seemingly sheer face of this two thousand feet of cliffside—in this piece of roadmaking unrivaled between the eastern and western shores of the American continent.

"Must we go down that?" Janis asked.

"Yes, or turn back," Leslie answered.

"Are you afraid?" Janis crouched nearer to Leslie, who put a firm arm about her and hugged her close, but did not answer.

"Are you afraid?" Janis asked again as she clung to Leslie's arm, shivering with fear.

"Am I?" Leslie asked herself. "O merciful Father, give me courage. Only the doubters are cowards." Then aloud:

"Why, no, Janis, I'm not one little heartbeat afraid," she said, in an assuring tone, and the sound of her own voice was good for her to hear.

"But, Miss Leslie, isn't there danger of skidding or slipping off or missing on a turn? Danger of getting killed any minute?" Janis asked, shivering with fear.

"There's always a possibility, little girl, but Somebody bigger than this hill made it, and He knows where to find a soul."

How full and strong and clear the voice now. In the splendor of a courage like this the frightened Janis grew brave.

"Miss Leslie, wait a minute. Before we start down I want to say something to you. To-morrow —I may not be here. To-morrow might be too late. You won't be offended if I say something, will you?" Janis asked.

Another great swirl of blue lightning revealed the cliff and valley, with the far glitter of rushing water somewhere ahead. In the blackness that

followed, neither spoke. With the moon suddenly dimmed, the wild loneliness and helplessness of the two adventurous wayfarers was magnified. In the gray light, Janis put a letter in Leslie's hand.

"Miss Leslie, take this letter. You can look at it when you get back to the cañon, up in the Ceremonial Cave, maybe, because it is so sweet up there. It's a note, and the correct copy of it as it was written first and meant to be. You'll understand it when you read it. Somebody that had no right to it got a part of it, I guess. I brought it with me to give to you sometime. Maybe, Miss Leslie, you'll care for it. But if you don't, remember, I was just wantin' to pay back a little for all you're doin' for me, and I meant this well. You are what I call a real Christian—not afraid to *die*, nor to *live*. Some's one and some's the other; only a few's both, and you are one of 'em."

Leslie thrust the letter safely down into the deep pocket of her coat, with little heed to what it might be about. But, face to face with the crisis of the moment, this was a time for sincerity, and the pride and the stubborn clinging to a once-determined line of thought and belief seemed folly now.

"I'll understand, little girl," she said, gently. "I've been paid a thousand times for all I've tried to do for you, because I know you trust a man I've doubted; and almost, yes, altogether,

I trust him now. But it is too late to undo anything. Let it go. We'll go to Albuquerque and 'Peter Rabbit.' You sit still, little brave-heart, and I'll drive this car where I want it to go, because I am not afraid. There are no Hun planes to drop bombs on us here. God holds this lightning in His hands, and we are His, too."

Janis stooped and kissed the hands on the steering wheel. Then the descent of La Bajada began.

Three turns down and the darkness fell. Above the rim of the cliff the storm cloud from the north suddenly poured a deluge, as if a Titan's caldron were emptied over the edge of the mesa upon them. There was no going back now. No driver would dare to attempt to turn on the narrow way and no car could face that up-climb in such a torrent. In the flashes of lightning the frightened little girl saw Leslie Jannison sitting like a very part of the car itself, holding a steady wheel, controlling her speed, moving with utmost care, without pause or haste, her face stern with control and bright with power. All the courage and trust and winning strength of a long line of New England pioneers—the self-sacrifice and self-control and faith of the Puritan of old—lived again in this twentieth-century girl on this far side of the wide homeland to-night, and gave her power and poise and the genius to direct, in that peril-girt spiral way down La Bajada to the valley of the Rio Grande. And the descent was made.

At the bottom the two breathed freely again.

"We did it. The worst is over now. It is a token we will get through to Albuquerque, where your loved one is waiting for you, Janis," Leslie exclaimed, the weight of all La Bajada seeming to be suddenly lifted from her heart.

But Janis only sobbed in her gladness and hope renewed.

Across the lower level, now rain washed, now moon illumined, the brave little car sped along the plains that lie between the Sandia Mountain range and the Rio Grande River. Across these plains, parallel to the river, the road, a trail of sand, has little of landmark in the best of weather. As Leslie and Janis hastened on with what speed they dared to use, the friendly moon turned traitor and a long thunderstorm, with its pitch darkness and its blinding light, held sway. Up in the Sandia cañons fierce cloudbursts had turned every arroyo to a little river, and every little river to a flood. The sandy road was drowned, the plains were like a sea, its surface splotched here and there with the coarse plants that cover them. And across these stretches ran swift and dangerous streams, unbridged, down to the big Rio Grande, rushing southward. How many things might wait to catch that car in such a perilous way and leave the two mid-stream or caught in its breakage. What deep gullies might be washed by the onrush. What

hidden rocks might wreck. What quicksands engulf. What fierce currents sweep away, in that black night's storm.

La Bajada was no more dire in its threatening dangers than these plains-engulfing waters. That, at least, had put solid rock beneath them. Here was no route to follow—an uncharted sea every foot of whose floods covered a sunken trail of perils. And the blackness of it all was terrible. To stop meant to lose all hope and purpose and chance for safety. To go on meant only uncertainty, with the same disasters possible at every turn of the car wheel.

Why did that night in France, the wrecked hospital, the rains, and the swollen streams come back in one quick flash of memory now, unless it meant to give new courage to the driver, gripping her wheel with hands that clenched like steel, and with a heart that stood still at midstroke, with every muscle tensed, and every nerve surcharged to the supreme call of the moment? Why did that glimmer of light on the Stars and Stripes leap up in imagery? And why did the sudden thrill of unconquerable America come now, with the words of the old promise:

> When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.

She had been brave in war. Would her courage fail her in peace?

In a flash of lightning Leslie turned a white face toward the little girl huddling beside her, and her voice rang clear above the anger of the elements.

"We cast our burden on the Lord. His will be done."

And the car pushed on. Now into the swift waters; now out; now on the level ground; now clinging to sideling slippery steeps; but it kept on. The two within it had forgotten that daylight ever came, or ways were ever safe, or that they had ever laughed and had no care. Ages seemed to go by them, and endless the torrent of rain that beat the earth, and boundless the currents that cut the plains from the Sandia to the Rio Grande. But, terrifying as the darkness was, the glare of lightning was many fold more terrible, for it revealed the width and anger of the foam-lashed waters.

And then somewhere, somehow, they did not know just where or how, the wheels were on a smooth, firm road, the deep darkness was slipping off, the moon, pale, then white gold, brought its old-new miracle of light, dwelling houses, homes with a tiny glimmer in them where bedtime had come late. Behind them, overcome and ended, the long fight with the elements. Before them, Albuquerque, its street lights gleaming the sweetest welcome the two travelers had ever known. The sanitarium, and Janis Gwin beside her beloved,

his hand in hers, a wan smile on the blue lips, a faint new light in the sunken eyes. Down in a guest room, Leslie Jannison in the dead slumber of exhaustion. And the battle of the night was won. As she had been brave in war, so she had been fearless in peace.

XX

A HOME IN THE HOMELAND

"JACK, the babies are asleep and Bryce and I are going down to explore the waterfall this afternoon. Will you come with us?" Cid Jannison asked. "You can't get out of here till nearly evening, if you are bound to go to-day, and the wonders downstream are worth while."

"Thank you, Ciddie. I didn't know how tired or lazy I was getting to be till I came over here. I think I'll trust you to Bryce for once. If he doesn't do well this time, I will bundle you back to New York," Jack answered, with apparent carelessness.

"Well, as you please, only we would enjoy your company. I'll trust Bryce to keep me out of mischief, new as the country is to him," Cid replied.

"Is he afraid he will intrude or does he really not want to come?" Cid asked, as she and Bryce Carroday strolled down the river toward the falls.

"Possibly both. When Jack Lorton says he does not want to do a thing, I learned, long ago,

to let him alone," Bryce replied. "I sha'n't miss him right now, anyhow. I'm satisfied with my company. When the Lord offers me a cañon ready made, like this, with Cid Jannison to help me explore it, I'm not finding any fault with anybody's reasons for not doing anything."

Jack watched the two as long as he could see them. Then he leaned back in his chair and wondered how long three hours might be. Fate had played a cruel part in these days just passed. A twenty-four-hour-old message, relayed by telephone that morning, carried the brief wording:

Janis reached Albuquerque in time. Mr. Gwin holding on.—LESLIE.

That was all. Jack did not know how much he had hoped to see Leslie until now there was no longer any probability of her return before he must leave the cañon. But why should he wait, even if she should come back?

"I might as well have gone with Cid and Bryce," he concluded. "I must kill these three hours some way. I'll go upstream and see why the water runs downhill."

So he wandered aimlessly up the cañon until he came to where the ladders of the Ceremonial Cave invited him to climb. Tourists had already told him of the place, but in a perfunctory way only did he begin its exploration. He had come West to help Bryce Carroday in the lawsuit. Now

that it was ended and he must "carry on," he realized how purposeless his days were becoming, Jack Lorton who had never had a purposeless day before in all his twenty-eight years.

"I guess I need a sanctuary, myself," he thought, as he studied the ancient place of worship. "It's not much like the little old New England tabernacles that have met my needs all my life till now; but I'll go down into that kiva and see how they did it. It doesn't make much difference where you are, if your call is the same the answer is the same. Lord knows how I need help. If I can't come up a stronger man, willing to meet the world with a smile, I'd better dig down instead of climbing out again."

The sun's rays through the opening lighted all the weird place as Jack climbed down to the bottom of the sanctuary of a forgotten priesthood, his own need for sanctuary service strong within him.

The interior of the kiva, as to form, suggested a great, circular, dry cistern. But the niches and other tokens about wall and floor gave mute witness to ceremonial rites in this sacred seclusion.

It was still early afternoon when Leslie Jannison came down the trail to the camp in the Frijoles Cañon. Cid's tent was empty, so Leslie hung her hat and coat on the frame by the wall and went over to find Mrs. Sidol. Teddy and Joyce

lay asleep in their mother's tent, their golden curls, the baby pink of their round cheeks, and the careless pose of their chubby little hands making a sweet picture. Their mother's cloak hung on the wall, and her slippers were beside the bed, as if their owner had just left the place.

"Your friends have gone down the cañon. They went away about ten minutes ago. I expect you could catch up with them, yet," a neighbor tourist informed Leslie.

Leslie thanked her and went inside to look over the mail. A letter to Cid in Jack's well-known hand lay on the table. The girl lifted it to her lips. And then for the first time since that moment on the crest of La Bajada Hill the memory of Janis's letter came to her.

"I must have been dazed by that awful night's ride. I had forgotten that letter Janis gave me."

She took down her coat from the wall where she had hung it, and found the envelope in the deep pocket. A pink flush swept her cheek as she remembered what Janis had said of it. A message of gratitude, no doubt, from an appreciative heart.

"Janis said to read it in the Ceremonial Cave, for it is sweet up there. I'll go up there now. Cid will know I am here if she gets in before I do."

In the daytime the cave is as alluring as it is under the light of the moon. Leslie clambered up the ladders slowly, noting, foot by foot, how the view of the valley changes. At last she stood

in the great space shut in on three sides by the cliff, and open wide on the fourth to all the valley below, with the vista of farther cañon wall and far blue mountain peak, and above it the overarching splendor of the cool, sweet skies of New Mexico. In this breeze-swept higher zone, the peace of nature, the sacred association of the place, the stillness of the hour, the call to meditation, to a balancing of human values, the needs of a human soul shorn of sham and glitter and temptation—all have their way with the one who stands in this weird and marvelous sanctuary of a lost people.

Leslie sat down on a sloping ridge along the floor, and for a while looked out at the picture framed by the cave's arched front. The memory of Gray Cliff on Sabbath afternoons, and the sunset on the low heights to the westward, with the green valley of the Connecticut and the Jannison farm below—the home of her childhood—all came back. With them came also the image of Jack Lorton, big and sturdy and manly. Jack, who had declared that his life should be clean and his work true. It was always Sabbath up here—voiceless, peaceful, far, far above the loves and sorrows of the valley below. It was sweet, as Janis had said; but, unless the high priestess carried down love and trust to the people of the valley, how could she be happy in the still beauty up here? The human touch alone makes life—yes—even the touch of baby hands—and home—and love.

Vaguely these things drifted across the mind of the sweet-faced girl looking out from the shelter of the Ceremonial Cave. And then she thought of the kiva, and of Janis's wish to go down only in the daytime. The long spearlike poles of the ladder extended upward high above the opening in the kiva's top. The descent into it could be easily made.

"Down there they held their sacred rites and trained their young men for their priesthood. I'll go down presently. The custodian says it is big and very interesting—their idea of a sanctuary's holy of holies."

And then came the memory of the letter. Leslie read it slowly, the neatly typewritten part first, a copy of Jack's note to Bryce, with his rubber-stamp signature. The date, penned in with ink, must have been an afterthought. It was the all-too-well-remembered day of Cid's dinner for Bryce, and Estelle Sidol's dinner for herself. But there was nothing in this note to make it worth keeping. Then the girl smoothed out the crumpled copy fitted to it most carefully. The same, except for the torn-off corner. Across the face of it the word "over" was written with a heavy carbon pencil. Leslie turned to the back of the crumpled sheet, and read in Janis Gwin's hand:

Compare the pinched-off corner with the copy. Mrs. General Sidol copped that corner when she called on Mr. Carroday here. I'm on.—JANIS.

Leslie dropped the letters and sat lost in thought. At last the meaning of it all dawned on her, and with it the shrewdness of Janis Gwin and her intuition and wish to help her beloved employer in his cause. Slowly at first, then clearly, the events of the early spring came back. The evening when she had read the "copped-off" corner in Mrs. Sidol's volume of Maeterlinck. The evening when Cid Jannison had put to nothingness all of Mrs. Sidol's claim for that Parisian vase. The real character of this Sidol woman, her heartless attitude toward her own children. If in two definite charges Jack stood cleared, and if this pretty pink-and-white serpent was the thing that all her acts and attitudes suggested, might it not be that in every charge the boy whom Leslie had always known, whose life was an open book, save for the three years in France, might still be clean, his ideals her ideals? Would they always be "fur together," little Jimmie's expression, as they were now? Or might they sit some Sabbath day on Gray Cliff and look down at the ancestral home to be their home, truly their own? The eternal *cave-right*, by which a nation, at the last analysis, must be measured.

"Oh, Jack, Jack!" The words escaped from Leslie's lips unconsciously; the cry of a longing, loving heart for what is dear.

"I'm coming, Leslie, I'm coming."

Jack Lorton's voice, deep and sweet and joyous,

sounded below her, as from the grave. Leslie sprang up and stood very still for an instant. The voice was so lifelike, so humanly near, it seemed impossible that it could be only a spirit breath. The next instant a step sounded on the ladder of the kiva as Jack Lorton's head and shoulders were thrust above the top of the sacred shrine. Another step and he stood beside her, his gray eyes full of light, on his lips a smile—a tall, splendid type of American manhood.

"Did you call, Leslie? I came here alone to pray down there that you might call me some day. I knew you were in New Mexico, but I thought you were down south, helping humanity. I wish I were humanity, Leslie, I need you so."

Leslie stretched out both hands to him.

"And I need you, Jack, oh, I need you so. I love my work. I shall always love it. But—"

"You can love me with it, too? Just a little bit, little girl of my heart's heart?"

"Better, always better, with you, Jack. I can't go on without you," Leslie said, softly. "I tried and tried to believe it would fill the void your going left. For, Jack, I had heard such tales in France—all from one source, I know it now—Mrs. Sidol—that I could not believe you were true to me or to yourself, and, much as I cared for you, I knew what it would lead to at last. You can't build a home on that foundation. But when I tried to help Janis—for your sake—she

helped me. I learned through her to trust you again."

"The blessed little cat! I know you can learn of her, for I know how true she is in her own Janis Gwin way. But, Leslie, Leslie, are you real? Are you my Leslie? May I believe you are?" Jack's voice was full of pleading.

"Till death do us part," Leslie said, solemnly.

Jack's arms were about her now, and in that moment of their betrothal the sacredness of the place fell on them.

"I had hoped this might be on Gray Cliff. I'm glad it is here," Jack declared.

"No place so beautiful as this," Leslie said.

" 'The West is the place where the dreams of the East come true.' I've quoted that to Cid all this year, but we will go back to New England to live, our new New England where we belong," Jack said. "And yet, in all the coming years, the memory of this place will be a holy one to us."

"Yes, it is a cave here, as befitted the life that was here," Leslie said, thoughtfully. "Our Gray Cliff is not so high, nor so hard to reach, but it is open to all the winds of heaven. And the old homestead down below is for us, as those little caverns down in the valley meant home to those who lived in them—and the cave-right —your own term, Jack—the cave-right is everywhere—the same."

"And we will be married in that little church

down on the Connecticut, by our own good Unitarian pastor, not down in a kiva, by priestly rites," Jack said, joyously.

They sat down on the kiva's rim, two lovers for whom a new earth and new heaven had just been made out of the same old earth stuff of tufa rock, and blue New Mexican sky, as new earths and new heavens will evermore be made of earth and sky, where youth and truth and love find setting, and sweet solace each in each.

"I almost forgot to ask about Janis and 'Peter Rabbit.' How is it with them?" In his joy Jack remembered his faithful little helper.

" 'Peter Rabbit' came back from the edge of the grave when Janis got to him. He is better, almost safe," Leslie replied. "But I doubt if he can leave here for a long time. He might live for years out here."

"He shall live wherever he can live best," Jack declared. "There's a little property of Janis's that I will look after for her, and I'll find them a living otherwise. Bryce is going to help me in that, good old Beloved that he is. Do you know he is down the cañon now?"

"He is? What's he here for? Does Cid know? She and Mrs. Sidol have gone down around the waterfall somewhere, this afternoon," Leslie explained.

Jack's face darkened.

"Leslie, Mrs. Sidol isn't here; she's dead.

She and her husband were killed by lightning the night of that storm, up beyond Buckman."

Leslie gasped.

"Why, the babies are down there asleep!" she said, slowly.

"Yes. Cid is going to adopt Teddy and Joyce. And Bryce, who is to manage the Sidol estate, which is mostly *not*, will be their foster father. Bryce and Cid have found each other. Isn't it glorious?"

"Why, Jack, are you telling me the truth? Beautiful! Beautiful!" Leslie cried.

"The very hope-I-may-die, cross-my-heart truth, Leslie. And they will live in Denver a part of the time, and in New York City a part. But their vacations will be spent here for love's sweet sake."

Leslie looked thoughtfully out for a long time at the magnificent panarama before the cave's wide face.

"A big, big America, and so much to be done in it to keep it big. But where the heart is that is home," she murmured. "It is a joyous heritage for those sweet children. But, Jack," Leslie's big dark eyes sought the gray ones, then turned away, "I'd rather stay in the old farmhouse back in New England. Jack, I have not forgotten what you said when you thought I did not care any more, when I really cared everything, but I could not trust you. You said that the cave-right of little children to be and to have a cave to live in, and to

be loved, and to grow up in a home of comfort and culture, and to go out into other homes, and bless other lives, not the cave of poverty and squalor alone, but the home of the educated, and the idealist, that will make the bigger America that we dream of. And maybe in the years to come, when you and I are gray and comfortably slow of step and content to watch the younger crowd go by us, we shall hang in our window the invisible service flag of peace, with its invisible inscription:

"Out of this home have gone sons and daughters into the larger service of their country, not only to die for it, but to live for it.

Our own children, God's precious gift to us."

Jack bowed his head reverently as he added, softly:

"And so shall our loved America be strong and clean and sweet, and our flag, the sacred old Red, White, and Blue,

". . . forever shall wave
O'er the land of the Free and the home of the Brave."

THE END

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